

APPEARANCE VS REALITY?
**ON THE
OTHER END**



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EMMANUEL

To My Mothers

*Aderemi Mary
&
Mary Gonzales*

Preface

Being an introvert, I am often seen as a weirdo, but no offense taken, I got used to not being understood; well, that's before I met the author AGE.

Initially, it took time to accept that he understands; over time, we turned from supposed enemies to friends and found some things relatable between us, safe that I'm such a lazy reader and he's not, but he makes it seem like I do well in reading.

ON THE OTHER END is one of the books I read with ease despite still struggling to like the act of reading art. It delves into the most ordinary human nature, blotting out unsaid fears of both known and unknown, which makes it a must-read book for many that is MAN.

Philosophy and religion have been on a rough edge rather than a balance over time. The author in this book has not just touched on both aspects which are related to life but has tried, in essence, to portray a balance.

Personally, I have learnt lots of lessons cross-examining this book, and it's a greater joy that it's out for others to find themselves in its pages.

— Peace Monday

INTRO

They Say One Sphere

*Life is not hard
It is full of problems.
When you can,
Just choose to begin with
The basic problems
And go on a pace of
One step at a time
With time, your consistency and experience
Will help you create new problems
Solution to which another man must find.
That way, we
Keep the ball rolling.
The problem-full world will have more problems
And just as many solutions.
But there shall be no one man with all the solutions
So that the created problems are problems indeed.
No sensible man will laugh at another
For the world will be peacefully confused
And we won't be more than humans!*

AGE

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ONE

The Brainchild

Fear tore through Lanke's thumping heart now that she was done doing her worst, and naive Honald had two people to be sorry for.

Refusing to give in to the unseen, Lanke managed to function within the thin and fat hooks of her fear. She put on her wet gown that way in front of the young boy, and aye, this action was the more gratifying coup to Honald who lay on his back and cast a lustful glance at Lanke, occasionally slyly perverting his eyes to the firm, ash, antique ceiling of his dark room whenever she had course to look in his direction.

Deep down, both knew how unnecessary this was between people who already had their genitals dipped into each other's bodies—except humans are very good at pretending not to be a part of the animal kingdom.

Understandably, too, it was also essential for both people to maintain their composure as much as they meant to mend their shattered dignity.

Time ticked by with all the miserable remains of their atrocity reaching a halt. The panoramic play of these scenes ensued in young Honald's sense, the worth of what he had just been through. He thought no one could have been luckier than him, as his ego came in motion.

However remorseful she, on the other hand, felt, she was alive enough to put back on her gown—although noticeably abashedly as if she were possessed to do what she had had pleasure doing. The short red gown she fumbled with clung firmly to her and accentuated the temptation-eliciting shape of her body in a way that made Honald lust to lie with her a second time—the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. What if it had not been so? Were there any chances that Lanke would agree to return to him with this much remorse on her countenance?

Lanke looked particularly woebegone as she stuffed her boobs back in the gown without a bra, such that her décolleté begged for engulfment the more. She knew she came in with a bra, but this was not the right time for such a haunt.

"I am sorry about what happened. See you later," she uttered abruptly as she found her way out of the room with her head rather groundward.

The new Honald, for he was certain something in his life had changed, wore a rictus of a smile and a prolonged stare as he watched Lanke leave.

The event, which ran noon through the evening, got Honald sleeping like he would not return to life. It was a few minutes past seven when he eventually slept the night before, and here he was Sunday morning, still sleeping. Two of his neighbours had rapped lightly on his door but it felt like he was not indoors; none waited to observe anything more.

This deep sleep might have led him up the way of his ancestors if his, say— now mother-in-law, the widowed landlady who saw that turning the knob of his door would help her know what the problem is, had not come around. It was unusual that since she returned from the market, the day before, she had not set an eye on him.

Usually, Honald, despite his reclusiveness, would go to see her on Saturday night and pose a couple of questions regarding the coming Sunday services at church.

Making it up from his countenance, the landlady in her early fifties was so interested in Honald that she referred to him as her son, and he, on the other hand, called her his mama—womanhood of whose daughter he had now... anyhow.

Tyres squelching the tar. A short pause followed.

In consideration of the unusualness, she decided to check up on him in the room because for this long she had not

set her eyes on her son, and she knew his chair was in the backyard the night before.

It was barely past eight AM, and they were already getting late for the first service in church.

Ideally, the landlady, Honald, and Lanke go to church at the same time on Sundays. But nothing could make it so today because the moment Mama asked Lanke to wait for her outside as she made to fetch Honald, Lanke had stridden a little then taken to her heels, churchward.

"Son, son..." the landlady called softly in this cooing feminine fashion as she approached his room.

Holy shit! This cooing, soothing voice, has a lot behind it. The one that had lured her husband into willing all his possessions to her, the one that had convinced him to do everything she liked, the same voice her husband had tried to please by working sheer hard all his life until he dropped dead someday, leaving her to her coo.

She observed closely and found the door was not locked from behind, so turning the knob helped to reach Honald. She saw lifeless Honald. Mama was on the verge of screaming when she noticed that he was still breathing. Two of her tenants joined in on their way to the backyard, both going to take their baths.

By this time, nothing had helped Honald effectively come to full consciousness, except for the bucket of water Baabife—the people's fun way of saying Baba Ìfẹ following the brainchild of a two-year-old—who was going to wash in the bathroom, brought with him.

Ibadan houses, especially those built with multiple objectives, are usually—at least, a storey building or whatever design—houses that will have many rooms so that you would expect a good number of people residing in them. In Honald's house, for one, the tenants could not be less than twenty.

Baabife who was initially heading to the bathroom, stopped by when he saw the door to Honald's room

thrown open with shoes scrambled at the entrance. Having seen what the matter was, he reached for his bucket of water on the aisle and turned it on Honald nonchalantly. Believe you me, there was no need for this but it happened anyway.

"Haaa," mama and the other woman in the room exclaimed.

Baabife retorted, "When he no longer has sleep in his eyes, he will dry his mat and other items in the room."

Poor thing, it did work. His eyes got clear, he came to life fully and was soon left with the landlady in his room. No, they weren't behind closed doors nor did Mama appear like she would soon be contrite or stuffing her flat boobs back in her bra or something. Just two sinners who wouldn't sin in common by virtue of age difference and all.

Nobody seemed to notice the stain or smell of some milk-like fluid on his boxer shorts, so Honald was safe

from these wide censorious mouths. One thing he was especially grateful for.

He, nevertheless, became the cause of that Sunday morning fight in the house. It wasn't uncommon to see people fight at the toilet and bathroom (which are never built together in large houses) as everyone rushed to bathe.

Now at the entrance of the bathroom, one of the two people who branched off to his room was claiming to be 'the chief tenant'. These were two young people: a lady and a young man.

"Are you okay at all? You were not blind when I came to drop my bucket of water in front of the bathroom before leaving for Honald, were you?" the lady croaked.

There would have been no need for this altercation if the toilet wasn't occupied, because you could also bathe there. Many people preferred it to the bathroom, as a

matter of fact, because it was 2in1; they were able to bathe and have a good shit in it at a stretch.

The lady attempted to step into the bathroom once or twice but her every effort was less than a pull from her opponent. An aggressive push from her, too, had gotten the man's back to the wall hard enough to make him bawl out, but nah, he would rather suppress this to respect himself.

Instead, he said, "...young lady, ahbi na madam I go call your papa, we are not mates and I will not stoop so low to take any insults from you just because I wan baff. The bathroom is not your father's property that you should dearly claim possession of, you know?"

As they exchanged dirty words and physical struggles, Baabife had gone to refill his bucket, and again, he walked past them into the bathroom, the one being fought for. He was an elderly man to whom neither of them could directly transfer aggression. In fact, his action settled the ongoing trouble in a way, as both young people stood

opposite each other, each holding onto his or her bucket, figuring out how to make it to the toilet or bathroom first.

Laughter.

'This is one of the houses that must have been built during the pre-colonial era in Nigeria,' a thought Honald had pondered over some time. Whoever sees the already dilapidating building knows it must have come through better days.

They used a pit toilet, which allowed for the passage of some good shit by squatting right above the cesspool—but now that the world is advanced, people who lived here no longer passed excrement into the round small hole on the ground directly. Everyone feared infection and more than that, the reeking pool was too obnoxious to accommodate anyone for a long time when the hole was opened. Hence, occupants used little paint rubbers or specially made plastics called potty, making the process resemble that of a small trading chain, where

manufacturers of goods get their products to the consumers through retailers.

Here, the potty is the retailer that passes people's waste products from the point of production to the final consumer; the pit, or maybe the living organisms in the pool, are the actual final consumers; what matters most is the chain resembling what people wear suites to do in the real world.

Behind the ancient toilet is the landlady's cage for birds. No one else was allowed to raise birds in the compound to maintain order immaculately.

The only true rationale Honald could come to when he was first told the reason bird raising was disallowed in the house, was the dung of fowls here and there. How else could bird raising result in a shambolic household? His landlady had said, "People around here, I'm talking of houses around us because we don't fight here, have had issues of people who stabbed themselves fighting over animals they kept. Thieves, too, may begin to give the

house attention if we raise too much livestock." But it made no sense to Honald.

Mama, the landlady was still with Honald. She seemed to have forgotten that it was getting late for church.

She asked, "What did you eat last night?" Honald looked at the landlady who appeared to be badgering him, and responded, "Which night?"

"Oh, Jesus God. Honald, tell me, did you take any hard substance yesterday?" Boy was naturally a heavy sleeper, coupled with the fact he was fantasizing about how important he would look in the eyes of Lanke... The fantasy developed into ecstasy, which was ultimately sleep-inducing, too.

At the mention of the hard substance thing, Honald sensed a bit of disinterest in his landlady's voice, and it wouldn't be in his favour if it eventually happened, so he had to round the confabulation off.

"Ma, I cannot tell you lies, something terrifying happened to me yesterday, but please... after church. We shall discuss it."

Just then did she remember it was late and with the exchange of a few more words, she left in a hurry.

Lanke did not remain at the front of the house, nor did her mother expect her to be there for she had taken a lot of time with Honald. Nothing left the trace of what had happened the day before in her mind so she remained coordinated, humming as she trotted to church.

Honald could barely stand on his own because he was indeed exhausted and had not eaten for so long. He managed to reel his way out of the room, reaching room after room haggardly, to do for the first time that which he detested. It turned out that he was begging for something to eat.

Luckily, he got about two cups of Garri, which some youngsters in this part have christened groceries or

cassava flakes among the scholarly, from a neighbour. He thought this, coupled with the little money he had left, would sustain him until his mother sent him some money for the new week.

Honald is a Kano state-born Nigerian whose parents were reluctant to allow him to stay alone in Ibadan, except they had no choice, or they were going to delay his academic pursuit. He had just been admitted into the University College, Ibadan, the year before. Honald, at the time, was so godly that he pleaded with his parents he didn't want to stay on campus, so he rented an apartment, staying *off-k* as it is called. He was sure that ungodly fellows would corrupt his good manners if he stayed with others in the school hostel. That is where evil acts like homosexuality, ritualism, and drug trafficking, to mention but a few, were introduced to people who will have to accept these things due to the threat.

At least, he has seen this happen several times in the Yoruba movies he watched back in Kano.

Although she was a white woman, Ella, Honald's mother, could speak Yoruba somewhat fluently—quite with the Canadian accent. This is because she is married to a Nigerian Yoruba man.

Strangely enough, his mother did not meet her husband in any Yoruba regions, nor had they met overseas; they had first met in Jos, a metropolis in the northern part of the country.

It was several years back now but still very alive in their memory, the narrative of how they met.

As she was transcending the fluttering years of her teen, Ella's parents had traveled over to Jos for missionary work in the church where Honald's father was a chorister. She joined them shortly to spend her summer holiday in a new environment—she loved forays.

It might have been the years when racism was at its peak, but those bent on spreading the gospel knew too well than to let the colored feel sequestered, coupled with the

fact that most of these preachers sincerely wished to emulate good deeds—they usually were just really or not so really nice, if not ostensibly obsequious and lickspittle. Yeah, they had their ways of making you pay the kind acts back.

This made them not so inaccessible despite being prone to having guards. Once or twice, Honald's father leveraged his position as a chorister to speak intelligibly with Ella.

He was tall, beautiful, *dudu osun black*, and intelligent, especially linguistically. The impressionable Ella started to develop feelings for him by seeing no reason he should not be loved. They grew fond of each other. First, it was agape, then they met under the trees at late hours. The rest is history.

Jos was accommodating to Whites. It is the coolest Nigerian state; those that have been there, including Ella, had told Honald.

"Economy aside, Jos, the capital of Plateau, is like America. I mean, talking of the atmosphere, you know Canada is usually cooler, but it is the most conducive Nigerian state for people that share the same skin as mine." Ella put her words long.

Back in Kano, people who knew him well referred to Honald as the carbon copy of his mother—he was more of the duplicate of Ella's bright countenance. Many times in his secondary school days, girls addressed him as *mijin mu*, literally translating to *our husband*, for they all wanted to have this beautiful creature.

Relatively all the girls in his class loved him, and a way to tell him without having to regret their words, considering that he was holy to a fault, is with the phrase *mijin mu*.

This way, he took it for no more than a play. But he still would not even offer more than a handshake to girls who called him this. He started learning to be romantic the day his mother realized how cold he was to a girl. Girls paid him august visits, often with presents whenever he was

absent from school, coupled with their surreptitious intentions.

Hadizah, one Alhaji Bala's daughter had just given him a new wristwatch, and he smiled flirtatiously so that Hadizah's heart lingered like she had won him eventually until he shattered her conviction by stretching out an arm for a handshake to appreciate her as earnestly as he could.

An apparition of disappointment caroueled across the young, dark, beautiful girl's face, and Ella could read it well from the other end of the Venetian blind that separated the living room from the lone dining room.

She joined in, something she had never thought necessary, and saw the girl off to the door. "Do take good care of yourself, my darling pretty girl. Your friend will be in school tomorrow. He had a migraine earlier today," she said to Hadizah, whom Ella thought would hopefully regain her esteem with these words. Hadizah soon went out of sight.

Ella turned back only to find Honald lying inert on the sofa with the remote control, tuning TV channels. He was still tuning in when Ella uttered, "Hey, couch potatoes, ain't you got some human feelings? You're now grown. Fourteen and counting is no longer a child; you could as well fertilize an ovum now, becoming the father of some child. On no account should you treat a girl like that again. A hug is not a bad idea if you cannot peck a lady who shows interest in you, especially in such ways as this. It is equal to saying that you have seen no value in what she did."

Could we say he was possessed by the Holy Spirit? The innocent boy literally looked at his mother's eyes, gave a gaze, and walked away into his room without a word.

As if this was significant, she continued, "How is it your fault? I have bothered your dad times without the number that we've got to relocate to the States." With quite some emphasis on the /eɪ/ in the word States. "Myself, I spent most of my formative years at Lake Plata, but... *baba é wa...em...em headstrong ah...ahbi kilode?*" She wrapped

up, throwing her fingers open skyward. Ella gave up on her speech and sat to watch the ongoing program before she could remember what she had been busy with beforehand, behind the curtain.

Noise.

She reckoned Honald was remorseful, not having the faintest idea that he had gone to admire himself in his room in front of a quite long mirror, the one he carried carefully to Ibadan in his dad's *moto ljapa*. Honald's father used a Volkswagen Beetle—the Tortoise/ljapa car—in the days when it was more commonly spoken about than breath.

For ten thousand Naira, the same amount that would not get the people a toy car many years later, the Moto ljapa cost an arm and a leg at the time. It was the talk of the day, although only a few—if that means privileged civil servants and politicians and perhaps a moiety of other personages—owned one.

Honald was fortunate to be in the pedigree of the said few, one other gambit that could goad him toward the things his peers did. But, among others, he was having this unromantic disposition, one reason his parents thought he would make a good child living alone outside the University College campus. After all, Dad came to secure a good apartment for him in Ibadan; they spent a week together to study the environment before he was left to live alone.

Initially, the fear of having his father visit him unannounced was the greatest in Honald because it might be the first day he would attempt to do bad; you never could tell. But a lot of things, too, got him scared at the moment that he lacked a sense of ranking according to their scale of preferences. Hence, his greatest fear is unbeknownst to him.

He had learned somewhere he could not remember that women benefit more than men in lovemaking. One of the troubles a man faces is that he shares with her whatever ancestral curses the woman possesses. And he had also

heard somewhere that men share of their wholeness during every such contact. He didn't know which of these was right, but one need not mention more harm on his side; the reverberating spiritual consequence in all the tales is terrible enough to get his head bewildered.

It sat unshaken in him that the curse affecting Lanke would be in the first-class grade of world curses. Because how could a woman as beautiful looking as her come for little Honald in a real sense?

How could a woman as old as this still stay with her mother without a boyfriend, husband, or even a child?

No, her kind of life is not the norm in Ibadan, or maybe Honald could not think beyond his vision. From what he has seen and could tell about Ibadan, things should not be like this for Lanke.

The city is blessed with flibbertigibbets—one can almost count the number of academically vibrant people

here—they are not as many as in Kano, Barnawa estate, where his parents reside.

In Ibadan, people compete with the number of children they have. In Kano, people compete for achievements. They also compete with achievements in Ibadan, but with a wrong sense—of childbirth and of appearance—doing all it takes to appear enticing, even when it means selling the same body. More than fifty percent of its residents have bleached their skins to the endodermis.

Girls as young as the sixteen-year-old Honald are already called mama this, mama that. You will see some of them walk around the city with wrappers tied to cover some parts of their flat boobs, with something as simple as tank tops.

To Honald, this kind of lifestyle is trash, rough, and seems very ungodly; he would not stop comparing the place to Sodom and Gomorrah. He was sure he would, sometime in the future, publish a book about his experience in the city. Despite this, Honald thought since it is the norm here,

living up to it would have made Lanke a better woman. It helps to remember that the concept of good or bad is largely relative.

Moreover, some of the Ibadan girls in question do not live with the men who get them impregnated. They either live with some single bachelors in the streets or, if their parents are cultured enough, accommodate them.

With a spoonful of Garri in his mouth, Honald couldn't help but bring out some flakes from his nose as he tried hard to resist expelling the ineluctable spontaneous laughter that gripped him upon this dirty thought. Life in Ibadan!

Anyway, Honald had three more encounters with Lanke and the latter became heavy. Having discovered that she has conceived, Lanke fled home to a place no one, not even Honald knows about.

The household she left behind has not been well because all are in search of her. But the good news is that if you

haven't gotten on another planet, you're still within eyeshot, earshot, and *humanshot*. A farmer found her on a cloudy afternoon, on the way to the farm. He knew nothing about her, so he walked past her.

Long pause. Noises from buyers and sellers at the market.

Bere who had been fixing a watch someone was waiting to get as the narrative went on, now came in. "Poor girl, she must have run for the fear of what her mother might say if she eventually knows about the misconduct," he giggled, then continued, "By the way, scriptwriters have their way of managing suspense and twisting plots."

"You don't mean it."

Still on the watch, he asked, "What?"

"It doesn't seem like you get what is happening here. The narrative I just related is not scripted nor acted anywhere. It is real. I saw it in a dream."

"It is very real!"

The *alaye* waiting for his watch was the first to chortle extemporaneously; Bere followed suit when he couldn't help it. It was obvious the dude also tried to hold his laughter. He overheard a large part of the long narrative, and nothing signaled that it would turn out a dream. He had watched Bere—the exceptional listener—nod as he listened, due, a great deal, to what he was working on—but the story got confusing at some point... only Matthew understood himself; no one else could retell the scenes panoramically.

"Joseph, *ahbi wetin dem dey call you, you don start again*," kikikiki. Bere laughed a little more... he'd spoken in Pidgin English. That's what such strange events made you do in this part of the globe.

Matthew stood with an expressionless look. Bere got the message: he was being serious here.

"Is this your cover?" he asked, pointing at a little round glass cover. Alaye nodded, and Bere covered the watch. They already bargained prices, so he exchanged the watch for some money, and the young fella was dismissed.

By now, his mind was no longer in the shop. He thought of the next proper thing to do, and more importantly, what to say about the dream he was told.

"Hmm... there can be reality in dreams."

Matthew attacked quite mildly, "This is not a dream."

"Had I misheard? I thought you said you dreamt it."

"No, not in the way other dreams are dreamt. It is a vision that I was shown."

Bere chuckled again, "Yes, *na the point be that*", he shook hands with Matthew and protested he should have made

his points clear in time. He had been right when he said 'Joseph'; he knew exactly what Matthew was trying to do.

Matthew sees things in the spiritual realm. Bere knows. He was usually told about these things; they were accurate visions, making members of his church regard Matthew as a prophet. As a matter of fact, Matthew's major source of income recently has not been from the barrow he pushes in the market; he has been getting more favour than he ever had from believers who ran to him for prayers.

The whole thing started about a few months back when he drew closer to God through fasting more often. Bere is aware of this change and how much wealth Matthew could accrue from being engrossed in it. Although he is a Muslim brother, he doesn't mind joining Matthew on this.

Upon realization, Bere said, "I think I am also convinced your dream is not an ordinary one. Something tells me Almighty Allah has a reason for showing that to you."

Matthew now elated, "Awesome, now you get the point. I have been thinking of what to do so that God's plan for me with this vision will not be denied. How does one completely have a dream about people he has never seen for just no reason?!!

"Once or twice, I have visited my church pastor, the one I earlier thought I would go to again on Sunday, but I have just got to rethink that the man must have, in a way, been the reason I am still left in the same spot. Whenever I go to him and say, look, this is the step I am planning on taking, he tells me, 'The Lord didn't say so'. I am tired, who knows if the Lord is not actually against the things I would have done in times past? It is high time I made do of the Lord in me."

"Religion, or shall we say life entirely, is mysterious... I wonder how you, being called by so many as a pastor, cannot solve your own problems yourself until you see other men of God," that was Bere.

"You see, things are not like that—the way you think. One cannot be the mirror with which he sees himself. I am tired of worrying about such things. Similarly, I was made to understand that my strength is in praying. I have prayed for a lot of people who would return to appreciate me with things they have, but until recent times, I have not once been able to see or hear from God directly; all I knew about him was what the Bible says." He touched a faulty watch clock in front of him, paused a second, and continued: "Our people say when a person is on the stage, he is watched by others, and only they, the audience, can see the performer's mistakes; he cannot figure them all out by himself."

He went on, "That is the reason when we go to watch sports like the high jump and relay race, you hear people shouting as if to teach the participants what to do. These people might not be able to do what the participants did—but all their goofs are clear to spectators, even the least experienced of them.

"You must have seen cases of sickly medicine men going to their fellow medicine people for treatment. Despite his knowledge of herbs, a sick medicine man has to consult a colleague, or he wouldn't be able to attack his enemies himself when he is under a spiritual attack. So to me, this is not a fault to pick in God's arrangement; it happens beyond Christendom."

Bere sighed, "Hmm! I am not especially perturbed with whether or not God is to blame—I am a believer too. Just, I would like you to know that in my understanding, your dream might be an important message for someone, somewhere. Everything happens for a reason."

"I thought as much."

It fell on Matthew to feel good, because it has always been his wish to have a colleague that will do this ministry work with him. He knew of some Nigerian pastors that were really living large at the time and believed subconsciously that whether with fake or true prophecies, he would go into the ministry and make

exploits. Is there a day people will not have problems and rush to the so-called men of God?

Pastoring is one of the most lucrative businesses Matthew grew to know. "So can you recognize the houses you saw in your dream given that they were brought to you in real time?" Bere thought aloud.

"Yes. It was vivid. Her home is in Ibadan. I cannot really lay hold of how it happened, but it felt too concrete to be just a dream."

"And all the characters?"

"Yes!"

"But I do not think we have the name of the only man that knows her whereabouts in the dream."

"Oh! The farmer? That turned out to be myself. I was on my way to my farm when we met."

"Haha... farmer *bawo*? (smiles) Man, this is becoming complicated, please light up that part of the dream."

Matthew enthused like a child, "That part was set here in our locale. I saw her around my farm in Abinirani area. Okay, forget about me being the farmer or having a farm. You and I know of Abiniran area. An....and, you see, if worse comes to worst, she should still be found within the state. Her people must have been running about to find her."

"Do you know my idea? I would be very glad if you agree with me on this. Please, I summon you to give it a favourable consideration, Matthew."

Bere revealed his suggestions, "I think we can go for her people in Ibadan. Thank God it's not all that far away. Give me your listening ear, please, and think well about this. Our going is not based on rapacity, but for the work of God." That was a lie, say—a white one perhaps, and Matthew knew it, too. His claim of being too sanctimonious is one reason Matthew had to act

moderate. Left in their original form, both people would be practically the same.

In their minds, they each already somewhat wished to go into ministry. They envied the affluent life that pastors, especially those who reveal visions, are open to. There was this rumor that had just made the rounds: the story of an imam who built a church, employed a pastor to pastor there, bargained to receive a certain percentage of the monthly returns, and subsequently ventured into car dealing with the returns he received. This made them think that the act is promising. Going to share this vision, from as far as Oḡkan Oba to Ibadan—the distance alone, plus the accuracy, as leverage to gain attention and credibility—would fail? Come off it!!

This may not be feasible in some other settings, but these ones have true understanding of their target people.

"God might decide to bless our hustle through this family, doing this." Matthew just hit the point in their minds.

"Well, on the note of 'going for the work of God,' I agree with you, so how do you think we can go about this?"

"Wow! That you didn't read a negative meaning into this makes my day. I pray the Lord will help us expand his kingdom as we set out for this. You never can tell."

"Tell me, how do we go about this?" With a supposed patient poker face, Bere threw the question to Matthew again, and this time he got it.

"I think there is just one more thing to talk about. And that is the way we would dress there. I think it would be nice if we could get two white cassocks, so as to appear like prophets."

They did some more talking until it seemed everything was well planned. It was about time Matthew pushed his barrow into the market when he remembered one other thing.

"Wait ooo. There is this other important aspect of our ministry we are yet to discuss." Bere, fully interested in the confabulation, perked up anxiously, "And what is it?"

"Having the narrative so brief is more like guesswork. Did I mention earlier that the dream is incomplete? What shall we do when we don't really know what happened before Lanke left the room?"

Bere hissed rather saucily and looked as if that was not germane to their plan, "Did you write the story yourself?"

Matthew replied bemused: "Nah!"

"The one who composed the story, which is Allah, will definitely show to us the previous episode—you behave like a non-believer."

Matthew could not say a word any more until he took both his barrow and his leave; he wondered what would end all of this. A few minutes later, he returned and

handed Bere some money, "We had forgotten I promised to give you the money before I leave."

"Oh! Yeah, that's true," Bere admitted. Matthew didn't wait to hear more. Bere almost instantaneously stood, looked at his shop—an old kiosk with a few fault wall clocks, several wristwatches, and maybe a million detritus of broken heads, handles, hour hands, minute hands, and sweep second hands either hanging somewhere in the interior of the shop or laying in clusters on his table or on the ground. Cobwebs stood benignly at the four cardinals of the kiosk; they only became a threat to Bere when a client or he came in corporeal contact with them. He went into the market, to the stall of the Buskoro clothes traders. He went for the white cassocks they had agreed on getting. He went for the future that lay in the present.

Neither Matthew nor Bere liked to miss out on any opportunity that came their way, especially because they thought they were predestined to be great. A creed that deceives the most.

These were not the Bere and Matthew of the Baptist High School. Society has done a lot in changing their view and stance in life. Matthew and Bere were good friends right from childhood. They had graduated from form six together at Baptist High School nearly eighteen years ago. They weren't privileged to attend the same institution for secondary education, but their camaraderie and austerity had been worth emulating, all the same.

These calm ones were always busy at something reasonable. They never had reasons to join other boys in fighting against other schools or beating up their teachers—they were either looking up artworks in books or doing some paintings themselves, not that they didn't read, but it was too seldom to be worthy of note.

Bere initiated Matthew into drawing, so whenever they drew, Bere's art always came out well, while Matthew's was never actually encouraging—his were tiny pieces of networked lines—just that. Only Bere motivated Matthew to keep it on; no one else did. But Matthew knew too well to get perturbed with this; he understood that the art is

more of Bere's thing than his. Bere was known for drawing at his leisure... it made him feel fulfilled.

Matthew too had had what he loved back in those days, but it was arcana, not a thing you just initiated some disinterested persons into, or they may try in vain to get the essence of it. He enjoyed solitude. Especially when it came with sitting alone to examine the sky or at things in his immediate environment, observing and grappling with thoughts of different subjects.

These things he found joy in doing were not the norm in the setting where Matthew grew up; the people wanted you to associate, they wanted you to do what your mates were doing—they simply think you're insane when you stay aloof.

All that was in the past. Now, several years later, Bere and Matthew seemed to have forgotten all about drawing and pondering. In terms of channeling leisure into one's aptitude, Matthew was the more privileged of the two. It must have been ten or so years since Bere last touched a

sketchpad. He had to survive outside the ecstatic world of art, with real humans, real objects, and some real struggles.

TWO

Sharing in the Dream

Bere claimed he had a dream in which he saw the other part of Matthew's dream. The dream?

Sitting at a backlog of papers on his table, Honald had picked some pieces of newspapers to study. He wanted to see how they were written—the idea of going into journalism while he goes to school had recently occurred to him. On his left hand were there *Hello Nigeria* newspapers; all closed papers layered to look like a thicker one. Pressed close by both the thumb and middle fingers left and right, his index finger intersected from the upper end of the papers at what seemed like the centre page combined. His right hand held open another newspaper which he would occasionally give a cursory or pretty stationary look. All this somewhere at the back of his house.

The backyard of his rented apartment is Honald's library; it is the most quiet place to read because his apartment is among these noisy, gregarious beings—proletarians who could not stay indoors for long unless it was dark or electricity was restored to watch movies in the neighbourhood—whichever way, they usually caused you to suffer their loud, sharp noises behind close doors as though the walls separating your apartments were ersatz

or say, some voice amplifier. They spend more time outdoors yet owing to their boisterous tendency, their presence in the building is always a threat to Honald's meaningful existence.

It was barely an hour since Honald had started studying the *papers* when he heard a loud crackling noise from his room. He hurried there and pushed the door open. Lo and behold, the Heavens showed unto the *son of woman* a new world, as he reckoned at the peak.

The figure turned out to be auntie Lanke standing *au naturel*. The exquisite-looking *shape* was that of the only daughter Honald knew his landlady had. The lad didn't flirt around with ladies nor was he exposed to *adult movies*, so this was literally the first time he would be seeing relatively, and quite crisply all that he had learnt about the external female reproductive system in Biology.

He was first transfixed, then in the blink of an eye, he had gone out of the compound to summon passers-by for help, shouting at the top of his lungs, so that his pharynx soon grew lethargic. In a few minutes, he became the cynosure of all eyes, but many walked past him. To the passers-by who managed to ask what the problem was, sophomoric Honald unbosomed that a woman had naked herself in his room in an attempt to defile him.

The most therapeutic listener he got was so kind that he took time to hiss before walking away. Two feelings whelmed him up thereafter: the doubts of being active, and his mental state; he was not sure he was okay in these ramifications.

Honald sighed after a long train of thought, still *standing by himself* in front of his trial—beautiful temptation. If it actually is, then this will without doubt, be Honald's most significant trial as a young man. He is righteous and hates to walk in the path of sin, but he is not sure if this was a sin. Honald's mind went blank and thoughtless at least for the first time since he stood. Before him was yet the figure, Lanke.

It should not be an exaggeration to say that Honald could, as a person, hide in auntie Lanke's bosom without getting discovered, had it been that he needed an asylum. She is about six feet tall with a little plumpy body structure. Using his skills of surveying as a civil engineering student, Honald saw that her front side is almost equal to her backside. She's not obese; you don't call this 'fat', she just has sufficient front and rear views.

Preposterously enough, she is twice as old as Honald. The thought of running crushed Honald and he rebuked it loudly, "God forbid." He is one of those who in fact

believed the stories to be told are so long that the Bible cannot tell you in detail all that happened ages past.

He has heard, for instance, that the story of Joseph is not complete in the Bible. The narrative argues that Joseph had not run for righteous sake, but for protection; he must have ran to get a pack of these things you used for safety during intercourse...

But here he was, poor Honald without contraceptives. He suffered from a riot of infantile deliberations, which emerged as regards his circumstance:

This must be a divine opportunity, you never could tell... It is not over until it is over—he was not sure this ought to get into his thoughts, anyhow, it continues—no fixed time for marriage in life... The righteous fall seven times and rise again... William Shakespeare's wife was eight years older than the genius... accuracy of details doesn't count here. They're facts or near facts.

Shakespeare must have a place in Honald's heart all the time, since his passion for literature even as a science student will never die at any point. Once or twice, he had thought of sitting for WAEC again then taking Literature, Government and a few other art subjects, so he could switch from his course to Comparative literature or whatever course was available for literature students. But

he didn't really know where to work after studying such. It will be crazy to discover that after your four years of studies at the University, you have to go from one school to another in search of a teaching job, for there alone he knew literature graduates secure jobs.

He looked ahead of him again. Lanke was standing without any article except for a waist bead that clung to the top of her hip looking like a corner-piece to show the boundary between her upper and lower body parts.

Waist beads are common with Ibadan girls. People who are curious about this usually take their hands down the back of girls as if to feel their butts whenever they hug any of these girls—one may regret it if done with an uninterested girl, though.

“Waist beads are used to seduce guys, so be careful with those gurls.” Halima, an old schoolmate of Honald, had written in the conclusion of her last letter to him.

Didn't they say the patient dog eats the fattest bone? Auntie Lanke, for that is what Honald calls her, was still being patient. Her intention to make love with Honald was glaring on her forehead and she would not mind singing it as a song. Honald's reluctance to run or show contempt in his facial expressions was one thing that brought hope into Lanke. She would be patient, has she

not seen the bones awaiting her? Although Honald's flesh, added to whatever his content must be, does not still make him fat. You could not expect a fat bone of a person like him.

Anything that requires gaining attention also requires one sine qua non: knowing your audience and offering what they appreciate. Lanke had learned this as a media student in secondary school, so she was going to employ the scope. She tactfully wore a smiley look to conjure her target even though her uncovered body was enough. Alongside the smile, she manoeuvred her natural endowment flamboyantly and to her amazement, it worked magic!

The ostensibly innocent Honald who was putting an arm across the door took two steps into the room. He shut the door behind him afterwards. As he moved closer, he shivered a bit and his legs seemed to have been programmed to move pretty slowly. Tears rolled down on his cheeks for reasons he would not bother to fathom out.

Spreading her wide arms out to bring him into herself, Honald mumbled “do your worst,” as he broke into tears. Love might be blind as they say, but lust sees what is not even there.

The match started with a cuddling session until Lanke was wet enough. The workout began and occasionally, Lanke would turn her orifice around so that Honald changed positions from underneath her to the top, and other ways too. Anyhow, it continued. Wet orifice and greasy fertility stick.

Poor thing, he noticed for the first time his broken mirror. Which means the crackling sound that drew him into the room was the mirror Lanke broke. And it doesn't appear to be an accident, because she did not feel sorry for her actions when he approached the room.

Since he became aware, Honald wondered why he could only think and no matter how hard he tried, could not mutter a letter under her *rideship*. By the way, he had lost his virginity and his mirror, now.

Does this mean he was no longer going to be promising? Honald preoccupied his mind with a lot of thoughts; reality and assumptions. He had heard one of his lecturers on campus tell them that it is inevitable for a man to sleep with a woman that is so determined to have him in the bed.

Yes, that was Mr. GAS, the shorthand for Gideon Ade Samuel. One of those science lecturers should answer this name because it will suit them better. Mr. GAS, the

one and only at University College, is a psychology lecturer.

Who knows whether he isn't actually right? But now Honald is convinced he should be flogged if he stands against this theory once again. The whole thing could be traced back to the topic 'rape.' Funnily enough, it was not a topic planned to be considered that day. In a way, it came up and people including the lecturer got talking about it. He said, rather certainly, that if a man tries to rape a woman, her plea or unwillingness might work in most cases. But on the other hand, the moment a woman throws herself austere in front of you as a man, you are in for it.

It was also at this point that Honald confirmed that he was in the world and of the world, a creed contrary to that which he will chorus alongside other members of the Youth Fellowship when anyone raises the lead in church. In its actual form, the saying is that: "we are in the world and not of the world."

After seeing a new world and embracing it, Honald now sees the saying as some play on word thing. He had begun to question his conscience if it was possible that a person can be in the world without being part of it, or whatever that 'of' means?

In a few minutes of transformation, Honald had started reading some completely new definitions to ideologies he used to hold in the past; seeing the world from an entirely new side. He pondered over a lot of things which he could now give answers to. The theory that brought about the saying that life is a mystery, and that of fate also seems clearer to him.

The concept of fate now became demystified because it is uncertain. Who could think that a studious student like himself, a civil engineer in the making, would give in to being defiled at sixteen? Perhaps, it is written and this must come to pass to fulfil all righteousness. All that he was to seek now is probably that this cup passes over him.

The mystery of life, on the other hand, is that he is no way close to Lanke. She appears to be very much older than him, even though he was not sure of her age. Anyhow, he knew she would be at least ten years older than him. She had studied to obtain her masters at the University College, after bagging her first degree at Berkeley Eleyele University, Niger River. Does she not have girlfriends and boyfriends?

Honald still found it hard to believe what was happening to him. Now 'life is vanity' means that all we say should not count because they are 'Lori-Iro'—lip service. We

would only get to know when we are confronted by circumstances we used to imagine.

Going forward, he recalled the day he was asked a question in psychology class. For all he knows, the psychology class is the most exuberant class at UC. There, questions will be posed to people and you will hear students talk about sex and all that as if they were not sins. Discussion time in the psychology class was one significant factor that tricked Honald into believing that he was an adult at sixteen.

Yes, they refer to everyone on campus as an adult, and psychology itself was often regarded as an adult education course. People will never forget the day Alfa Habib stood up in the class to ask Mr. GAS if they could organise a day for practicals. "Practicals?" Mr. GAS had uttered slightly confused. This portrays a dramatic irony as the entire class already knew that which was unknown to the lecturer. They chortled and Mr. Samuel watched the fools applaud their colleague.

On this wonderful day, Mr. GAS pointed at Honald and asked him:

"You have been giving your girlfriend money and whatever she asked but have never had her in bed. On one fateful night, she visited you alone for the first time.

After spending close to an hour speaking with you, she is set to leave. Will you let her go untouched?"

Learning about the question, the entire class went rowdy and some people shouted his name repeatedly until they saw him frown.

Of a truth, the guy in question is innocent and he hates to discuss things like this, for they appeared sinful to him.

However, he was going to answer this question because it sounds interesting. Moreover he had been appointed by the lecturer in-charge to talk. The class soon went quiet to hear his answer to the question because he is damn calm and reclusive that nobody could bet what his response was going to be.

"Reality be faced," noise broke out again, uproariously for reasons he could not decipher, but he managed to continue and a few who were interested in hearing him went silent.

"I will let her go," he encapsulated a thousand and one thoughts in his mind to save him from a long debate.

But then, it felt like he had attempted to quench the fire in hell with a bucket of water. The guys on the bench behind him teased his head playfully amidst the ongoing hubbub. Everyone close and far, including Mr. GAS was on him. His point was disputed with several other views for

people who would not put themselves in his shoes. For as much as Honald knew, they had just spoken for themselves.

Honald had not opened his mouth to say what he was not going to do for commendations or whatever. No, he never buys the idea of ostentation, even when it is free. He knows he is paradigmatic and should be imitated by the rest of the world if he must live a better life. What is so special about women that people want to kill themselves for?

Although he had always admired women with full fronts and backs, Honald was sure he was smarter than the devil and would at least only maintain an on-the-surface romantic moments with ladies of this endowment if they were interested in him. He would not do two things; begging a woman for love or making love before marriage.

He knew not the word but Honald was sure that the majority on campus give themselves to be controlled by the flesh. The flesh is one great enemy of progress in a person's life. All that it wants are things in contrast to God's wills for mankind. In a nutshell, the flesh is the opposite of the spirit. When the flesh controls you, it contaminates your spirit to appear bad.

“I have just said my church mind. Why should I bother a woman I am not legally married to in the first place? As a matter of fact, sex is nauseating to me. I am not claiming to be Holy or stuff, but I mean putting things as they appear to me, that is what I will do,” Donald still shares the ideology he would not stop holding to people who seemed to be interested in hearing around him.

Mr. Gas worsened it all when he shared a non-fictional story with them.

There is this gentle guy who has been spending time with a girl for quite a long time without touching her. He would ask her for intimacy and the clever lady would turn him down. On a fateful day he conjured her to go home with him from her workplace. She agreed after a number of pleas. They got to his house and she was about to leave after a few minutes. She had stood to leave when the gentleman locked the door in front of him. It was the only way out so the girl knew what was about to happen.

The guy being a man of few words also, didn't drag with her. “Undress,” was all he said. But the smart obstinate girl will choose to act smart. Her eyes darted around the room for a way out and she found one. Beside her was a bottle. She picked it up and the lad, having locked the door, thrust the key into the pocket of his trousers. As if frightened, he stepped away from her as she broke the bottle, threatening him to unlock the door.

To her puzzlement, the young man withdrew a glaring edged cutlass underneath his pillow and she broke to tears on her knees pleading for freedom. The gentleman had his way with her and she was left with shame.

“Honald!” a colleague called to restore his attention. “The point in this is shame,” he added. If such happens, one reason you would not want to let her go is shame.

She has won over you if you let her go that way, don't be surprised when you realize you have become a joke in the community because everyone must have been told how foolish you are. She will claim to be smarter than you and proclaim she outsmarted your attempt of rape. As a man that you are, GAS could see doubt boldly written in Honald's face but would not give up on his unprecedented address. Honald was his point of contact to everyone in the class. It was a lesson for both guys and women.

“You will think about a lot of things that will trigger you to force her to the bed.”

At the mention of this, there were chorus opinions from different angles of the class making it go rowdy again. Mr. GAS turned to the class rep, retrieved the attendant list and left the class.

Some women and a few guys gathered around Honald to tell him all that were in their goddamned minds. In the long run, to avoid getting a cognomen from these people, he feigned a smile.

They were unwise enough to think that there was an answer 'yes' in that smile. Bro Tonny, the man who concluded the first part of the gathering in the class rounded off, *“so make you better wise up ooo. You no know say women no de smile. Them go just wan chop without reciprocating.”* Reciprocating, Honald believed, is the longest and the only jaw-wrecking English word Bro Tonny has in his head. As he wrapped up, Honald also had this to tell him in his mind ‘it is you who should think of wising up, not me.’

Honald knew he had messed things up big time. His conscience was pricking him now and the first stanza of 'Vanity' by Birago Diop, a poem he had analyzed in his junior secondary school days, crossed his mind, partly:

*If we tell gently gently
All that we shall one day have to tell
Who indeed will hear them without laughter?*

The first line of the poem touched him and lost Honald became aware of his environment again. He moaned a

bit—repeating the production of a nasal sound, 'm' faintly without the involvement of the mouth as a speech organ, he breathed heavily.

Lanke's gown, which must have been flung on the mat as she made to break the mirror, was now wet partly with a milk-like sticky substance and majorly with sweat under Honald who was only about halfway alive beneath the supposed rapist. It smelt strange, it made Honald feel nauseated and once again he thought sex was filthy.

THREE

The Magical Transporter Idea

They knew they would return home to their people after the exploit they were going to make, so they wouldn't burn bridges. Some people should be aware of their whereabouts—where they were headed and how long it might take them. This may not matter elsewhere, but it does in this setting.

The Yoruba people strongly believe that when you do things the way they are done, you'll get a precedent result—something you could be assured of. In the same vein, the exact opposite will happen if you fail to keep to this simple principle. Matthew and Bere, however religious, still understood there were elements of truth in this.

Relatively no one in the town does not know about the story of Deralid, even though none of his contemporaries are alive now, perhaps they never were. His story has remained oral for eons, but it is always passed down from generation to generation. As a matter of fact, no one knows the year it had all happened, but it is said that Deralid was a sculptor who loved his wife and their only child dearly; he would literally do anything to keep them happy, to say nothing of keeping them alive. Despite this lovely narrative, he died an abominable death.

On that fateful summer day, he had risen feeling somewhat glumly, but had managed to go to the farm with his younger brother when the news of the ghastly accident his wife and child got involved in reached him in the village.

The report has it that the accident was so fatal it claimed all lives in the vehicles involved. Deralid immediately became weary and had probably thrown himself down from a bridge in the village—no one knows for sure if it is from the bridge or rocks around he had threw himself into the river, but any of these sounds logical, so what matters is that he had thrown himself from a quite distant altitude. Sadly enough, his head had hit a rock in the then shallow river, he might have hoped for this, but his corpse was eyesore; it wasn't pleasant to look at.

His daughter and only child returned to the village later that week to feed her father the news of her mother's death, but she was fed up with him. Nobody knew the daughter would survive the accident. In any case, the untamed ghost of Deralid disturbed the entire community, and no one could sleep well for the first three days until rituals were done...

This isn't something exactly usual, so local research into the cause of the incident outside the voice of the Oracle

was conducted. Insiders noted that Deralid's daughter had been looking at herself in the mirror at night lately. In the land, this is not short of a taboo. Whoever does it loses a parent: his or her mother, to be specific. But they weren't told things could as well get beyond this—the young girl lived the rest of her life in sorrow. She died single when she was forty-five.

The idea of this and the palm wine tapper who had dropped dead from a palm tree when he went to tap at the time everyone else had refrained, going by the custom which held that after the fall of a monkey off a tree, all tappers and climbers alike should wait three months before climbing again, are enough to make you heed the superstitions of the people. All other climbers who kept to the doctrine continued life and lived fine after the tapper's death.

Monkeys are ersatz men, especially in the act of climbing—they symbolise the highest level of expertise in the activity and as such are usually the first signal to the land whenever the gods of the trees demand a break. Any monkey that falls off, will never be able to climb trees again, he would cry bitterly around the village and spend the rest of its life roaming on red earth or accepting bananas, only good ones, from people behind closed cages. It is not fine in any sense; these things are highly symbolic.

They told some people only about the trip, and not its actual motive. Your dreams are never meant for those who don't share in it. Those they informed are two trustworthy people at their workplace and the Baale, Ọkọllu, right in front of Bere's abode. More importantly, people setting out on expeditions like this are supposed to go beyond the Baale's palace and pray at the feet of the statue in the open area—it is called Aloṣiwaju, the people's god of protection. But God forbid, these were Bere and Matthew, devout Muslim and Christian, they wouldn't stoop so low. They prayed to the God of their faith and strongly knew he was going to protect them. Matthew took with him a refillable lighter, a machete, some Garri, and wide wrapper fabrics to cover up whenever they wanted to sleep.

Bere took quite the most important things: their two white cassocks, a map to follow, a wristwatch to check and a machete too. They didn't bother taking much to eat with them because first, they knew the journey wouldn't take them a week, moreso, they had machetes and a lighter to make fire and prepare some animals they would hunt as they walked the wild thoroughfare.

"Anything else?" Bere looked around, "anything left?" Absolutely No, Matthew observed.

We shall now leave. By foot, they took off at Ọkan Oba, Bere's household right opposite the Baale's palace at Ibùdé.

The trip started out well and proved fun at the sight of new places, new people, fresh smell, and beautiful landscapes. They were so carried away by these views they didn't even know it was the end of the day already.

The following day was very much like it. They met hospitable people who were pretty willing to share what they were eating with them. But you just don't take eatable things from strangers—one ought to be careful. When it turned dark that day, they stopped at the path of a shallow bush to rest when they got into a conversation with a fierce looking man. He happened to be a hunter with a kind heart. He spoke to the strangers about his people and their custom and that it was bad for them to sleep where they already attempted to sleep—they'd later come to know the reason for this. In the meantime he asked them some questions, and the following conversations transpired between them along the line:

“So you know Ọkan Ọba?” Bere picked the question out of Matthew's mouth.

The hunter smiled, “I am telling you. Only, you know a man dies wherever his dreams cannot survive.”

Matthew was mind blown, “Sounds whimsical yet rational. Do you mind telling us what you mean by this?”

“Not at all. Man lives his entire life chasing illusions, the things he dreams of—which he always is strongly convinced he can attain,” they heard the remaining part of the last words faintly, because the hunter had almost instantaneously left them running into the bush in the direction of some dogs that barked incessantly. Unsure of how to pass the night, they ran after him into the dark, thick bush.

Later that night, they sat to tend the fire and prepared the two squirrels they'd caught together. In the course of this and over the meal they ate with it, the three discussed extensively, with the hunter mainly doing the talking. He told them in detail the reason their lives would be endangered if they slept near the bush as strangers. Further, learning about their trip, he taught them to make a juju that would help ease the time and effort the journey requires.

“Haaaaaah,” the hunter bawled out in the middle of the conversation, “man is the deadliest creature on the planet. I have been to thick forests in group game hunting, I can tell you about the lion, bear, and wild cats, but by and large, I have not come to know of anything wilder than

man. Do not doubt it when I say the night guards themselves would kill you, get praised and more importantly retain their jobs.”

“But we are no robbers,” Matthew and Bere said in sync.

“How would the villagers believe you are not robbers when they don't even know a thing about you? The custom is that any guard that has not killed or at least caught a thief in the span of a year is not regarded as competent and as such loses his job. These people also want to put food on the table, don't you get the point?”

Bere and Matthew felt these words were anaesthetising, but toward whom will they change? They share a common dream, one bifurcated and given them each by fate. Things needed to look fine and lit anyway, so they had this ersatz laughter. Then a little pause.

At the thought of their earlier discussion, Bere broke the silence, “So is there any time of the day you'd recommend we burn the cheetah's hair?”

“The truth is you can do it anytime, but it won't work if anyone other than those who intend to use it sees it. This is why it is advisable you make these concoctions in a place far from people or in the middle of the night.”

The hunter had taught them to make a magical transporter 'kanoko' that could take them wherever they desired, provided it is mentioned in the few lines of incantation they have learnt to recite. Its only consequence as they were told by the hunter is that while asleep at night, they would walk everything they avoided walking at day, waking up tired.

You make this juju with the tuft of hair you find in the dwelling of a cheetah—it has to be the hair that pulled away where he laid. The finger of an Eagle and ashes from hot coals are other things necessary for the combo. One is to finish the juju on any fur fabric.

Kind thing, the hunter had enough cheetah hair to part with, so he helped them with it. They were to buy the nail of an Eagle, but that wouldn't be hard to get. This knowledge they had learnt for free made them elated. They appreciated him earnestly for this.

Some time past five at dawn, it was time for them to go their separate ways. Neither Bere and Matthew nor the hunter could sleep the night before; the man couldn't take them to his residence, he already told them something about his people and trust issues, but there was still no reason to hate on him, he had embraced them and taught them a number of new things. He hunted with and dined with them. They liked him.

FOUR

Attempting the Transporter

As their drifting continued, they laughed at the idea of transporting themselves with something diabolic. They had simply played along with the hunter as he spoke and more especially, they just teased him. Nothing about the idea was godly, they shouldn't even be walking with the hair he gave to them. They thought when they got to any flowing river, they'd better dispose of the hair.

That said, they were focused on what was ahead of them, checking the map and Bere's wristwatch every now and then, to properly keep track of their movement. Their transportation was by foot. Being the foreman both of them depended on, Bere started feeling like a driver; he was the leader here. They went on. It got dark and they slept somewhere behind a stall.

The following morning when they moved on, they soon began to feel at home. They had this feeling that they were somewhere familiar but it would be the most unimaginable thing so there was no need to question the reality of this, it must just have been coincidental. Nobody said anything about it.

"Guy," Matthew uttered eventually.
"Yes?"

“Where are we?”

“Wait.”

“For what? I'm feeling at home here.”

“I think I have the same feeling too.”

“What are you talking about? I don't understand what all this is leading to. Look ahead of you. Isn't that the Udala tree along your street?”

Bere didn't respond, he already saw what Matthew saw. He knew what he knew, it was always like that, except that he could read the map while Matthew couldn't. The same map and dexterity that had accidentally brought them back home. From the moment they caught a glimpse of the Udala tree and its surrounding, they ditched the idea that they had progressed all along. They knew exactly what had happened and understood that there was no alternative to going back home to rest.

There was a long silence between them. Before anyone could talk again, they were at Okan Oba, in front of the Baale's palace. For a long time, they glared despondently at each other. In shame and in turbulent minds, they moved quietly into Bere's room. This was so much of a shock that they just didn't know how to recover from it.

“It is fine,” Bere said as if to immediately retract it. Matthew nodded.

“We should rest and think of what went wrong and properly replan before setting out again.”

“You went wrong,” Matthew responded, pointed fingers at Bere, then leaned against the wall, “It was you and your map that went wrong.” An outburst Matthew had.

Bere found it hard to understand Matthew's point. They had been walking through the bushes all together and he hadn't cautioned him until they accidentally returned to the point where they started. It was a sheer mistake.

Neither of them would allow the other to wash himself clean in the face of this, they soon began to raise voices at each other. One thing kept them going, nevertheless, sharing the same dream. They reunited before long and new plans soon came into execution. They would be transported now.

“Are you sure no one will find us here?”

Busy with the burning, Bere nodded in the affirmative.

“Well, I don't think we would be able to go again today.”

Hisses. “Will you take your leave now?”

“Relax, we are on the same page. It's just for some emphasis.”

With resignation, they had agreed to make the magical transporter. Their act of agreeing to not disagree on this had been pretty implicit, otherwise guilt would not allow

them to make it. It took time, extending into the middle of the night, so they had only a few hours rest until dawn.

The transporter was handy now and they were ready to go again. In accordance with the instructions given, they were to spread the fur fabric and stand on it, followed by the recitation of the appropriate lines of incantation. They had done all that was necessary and were at the stage of recitation. At the brink of the last few words, Matthew felt so contrite and nervous, he fled the fabric making a sharp, loud noise.

Bere didn't see this coming, he had said the last words before he knew it and brrrrhm, he was at Ibadan— a passer-by down the alley where a shallow stream passed confirmed that to him. In any case, Bere had never been this traumatized all his life. He couldn't even fathom if he was angry, sad, or disillusioned, he was just there alone in this lonely path of the bush for a long time.

He was at Ibadan now, but the one with which he shared his dream could not be found. Where does one start? Where does he continue? How does he navigate his destination in the largest African city—when he is largely unfamiliar with it? He needed the right one, the one with the vision, the one that couldn't come with him. A lot ran across his mind. He must return or there will be no point in being here.

He repeated the same process that brought him, and brrrrhm, he was right at the spot where he took off at Ibùdé. He comported himself near the bush and looked around for Matthew. There he was, almost getting out of sight, walking down the aisle... Matthew ran after him and caught up with him.

First, it was assailment toward each other then empathy followed. For the very first time, they were ready to disagree to agree. Verily, it was a major quarrel. But one thing, in all they did, leaving each other was never a resort.

“You should never have watched me go alone, what were the chances I would return and find you?”

“We know it. You would. But in all honesty, my heart was going to jump out of my mouth as we approached the final line of the incantation. I couldn't help but do what I did.”

“What if I tried but I couldn't return?”

“Then it must have been meant to be.”

A long pause, some more conversation, and they were good again. But preposterous as it was, in all they raised voices about, they had this oversight on the consequences of the juju Bere used. It was the most insignificant thing that occurred to their lateral prefrontal cortex—but your

failure to think couldn't change an ounce of reality or your fate.

Anyway, they worked at Bere's place again, reconciling their differences. The ones they never knew occurred. The ones they have come to know about themselves as they try new things. This experience should have been exciting but it's been turning out pretty askew.

Later that day, they reached a conclusion and were ready to chase their dream again, but by now it was scorching outside. They were glad it wasn't dark, though. *Their dream should not sleep one more night.*

This time, they already felt too broken to think of using the juju again. Nobody mentioned it. They wouldn't. They would set out again to go about their expedition, only now with new strategies; with some additions and subtraction on their initial plan.

Among others, they were going to seek and take directions from other people—asking narrative for the right path as they went. It worked magic, they covered a colossal part of the journey—at about 11 pm that day, they stopped to rest at Ikare.

Bere checked his watch and saw that they had walked for nearly eight hours straight: they took off from Oḡkan Oba

at about 3pm and here they were at Alapa in the dark, 11pm. It felt good to have come this far and to have put in this much effort. Beside a layer of rocks, they talked a little about the following day and eventually they slept on an empty stomach that night.

Five

The Aftermath of Attempting the Magical Transporter

Due in large part to the toilsomeness of the previous day, waking up early was not realistic for these ones. Nevertheless, Matthew was up again at about 8am, and he was at first taken aback at the sight of what was happening next to him: it was Bere walking in his sleep. This action doesn't exactly match the concept of sleepwalking where you stood and walked unconsciously while still asleep, this was something you did lying down except that your legs and hands are in motion.

It didn't take Matthew a couple seconds to recollect that the hunter had told them something about this. He put himself together and became calm again. He waited, and gave his friend some time to finish up.

Two hours had passed and Bere was still walking. Matthew empathized, imagining how stressful this must be for Bere. He looked at it closely. Out of curiosity, he laid down with his back to the ground, looked around, saw no one and imitated what he was watching Bere do. It was no easy thing whatsoever, it is certain that Bere would have body pains when he was done walking.

In the meantime, Matthew went around to collect fruits and thought he might hunt some animals for food if he

found any—a really thick bush lies ahead. For the distance he covered, he found no animal but he got some pawpaws and guava. Those were enough for breakfast, so he returned and started to eat the fruits when the thought of how much more time Bere would take crossed his mind.

He reminisced on what the hunter had said about this, “*Kanoko* isn't some highly consequential juju you use and worry that a year or so would be deducted out of your supposed lifespan. Naaah. Only you cannot avoid the full length of what it helps you quicken; you will repay whenever you lie to sleep. How long you would walk in your sleep typically hinges on the time it would have taken you to cover the distance...”

Wooooo, Goddammit, Matthew thought out loud. “Bere may have to walk in sleep forever... no, not exactly, but for a long time. Ibùdé to Ibadan is about 300 km—approximately a four-day journey by foot. But all this would have been reasonable if he hadn't used the juju twice in a row.” As the thought of how far Bere must have covered went on in Matthew's mind, he had also remembered that the hunter noted that using the juju twice or more times in the same day would affect the time one would spend walking in one's sleep in equal measure.

“What the actual heck is this!” Matthew said as if to say next that he quits.

Bere would still be here walking in six or so days, and what would he be doing all this time! Watching Bere walk in his sleep again and again? He had ducked into an opening in the layer of rocks around but he wasn't sure this vacuum would contain two people together and even if it did, it would be crazy to attempt to carry one who was so actively walking in his sleep.

Matthew hoped nobody would find them there throughout the days Bere would be walking or he might have to explain and share the purpose of his life with some strangers. A train of several other thoughts went on in his mind as he sat stationary beside his friend.

Restlessness kills thoughts, Charles Duff must have been right on this. But more importantly, he had equally admitted that leisure borne different vices. If you are allowed so much time to do whatever you wish, you might as well wind up doing what you hadn't wished for—discretion and its bale—it is not uncommon among man and animals. With enough time, you could think and may do really exquisite things or not think so much and be preoccupied with making life worse.

Left with nothing to do, Matthew soon thought of mapping out the places between Ibùdé and Ibadan, to track Bere's movement. Good idea, it seemed. He found some dry sticks around and took a little one he could comfortably hold as a pen and do some inscriptions with.

But one more thing, everywhere here was majorly stony and had very little sand, so he needed more sand. He dropped his stick, went around—to places that are quite more Sandy, fetched from them and brought sand to the spot with his hands. He wanted a large map that could make the tracking easier, so he had to go fetching multiple times.

When it was sandy enough, he picked up the stick again and started to draw. The map started with Okan Oba, Bere's place at Ibùdé where they had taken off, and its terminal point was Ibadan, where he has never been. The exact place to stop at Ibadan, he had tagged “Honald”. He mapped out the Local Government Areas of other towns along the line...

However vaguely defined the locales in it were, the map looks fine for tracking. He was sure he could use it like that. He would make his mind think these improvisations are the actual places you got to—inasmuch as everything on the map would measure up to 500 km.

It is possible to cover each kilometre by foot in 15 minutes, at least typically so, but it would only be realistic to cover 500 km by foot in about four days if one walks non-stop. What are the chances Bere would be stopping to rest in the process? He hadn't noticed him do that, anyway, he carried on.

The total walk time (approximately 4 days) multiplied by two (for the double usage), and total distance to be covered (500km) minus the distance and time Bere should have covered.

“He must have walked thirteen hours now,” Matthew said and inscribed some things beside him. “And covered probably 13km.”

These calculations didn't have to be exact, the promising thing for Matthew here was that they gave an estimated idea he could track with. He was okay with this so he went about mapping.

He had barely tracked for an hour when he started to drop off. Occasionally, he would abruptly get back conscious from his slumber and assume he hadn't dozed an ounce, continuing where he had stopped—he traced with the stick in his hand.

Before long, his perspiration waned, got so exhausted that he lay beside the map, on the spot where the distance covered and time spent had been worked. He went blank and soon started to snore away, rolling on the map he drew.

It wasn't until crepuscular twilight before he fully regained consciousness upon reinvigoration. His mind wished he continued with what he had slept over but hunger got the better part of him. There was still a piece of pawpaw around, lying on his bag.

A mouthful of the pawpaw must have been thought provoking, it made him imagine how hungry Bere should be having walked for hours non-stop. So concerned he was that he went and forcibly stuffed the remaining pawpaw in Bere's mouth. The pawpaw got in and was behind closed teeth but everything that made Bere was moving—at work, which made it rather difficult to tell if he could eat the fruit. In any case, Matthew thought it would add up. He sat beside Bere and watched him chew.

There was it again, enough time to do what he loved. He moved some distance away from Bere and started to reflect on the past as well as pondering over a number of things. He gazed and watched the cloud moved in every which direction, he gave himself in to feel the air that blew deep in his bones and appreciated the way he saw

plants waved—he had learnt that this was the way plants praise God. The factuality of this proposition isn't the point, that believing it doesn't hurt in any way was enough.

Nature can be refreshing; he enjoyed the staccato and legato—the entire rhythm watching these things had passed across his brain. It was dopamine inducing.

He thought of the things he has accomplished so far in life, the things he's now up to, and what awaited him—where he had failed also occurred to him. It was in this process it had first seriously come to him that he needed a woman. He never took anything like this to heart. He didn't think there was any necessity to get married before one lives perfectly, not because he craved celibacy but specifically because he didn't want a woman to truncate his dream—he also didn't want liability. He believed a woman makes it hard to go forward in life.

Almost suddenly, hunger revisited and he rose, took his bag and his machete, heading into the bush. He hunted and ate fruits for some days before returning to check up on Bere.

As expected, he was still at it with the aftermath of the magical teleporter. Matthew opened Bere's mouth and found that the pawpaw in it had vanished, this meant that

it must have found a way down to the solar plexus, and that encouraged Matthew to stuff the banana with him in it again.

That must have been the third or so day—there was still enough time for exploration and all that. Matthew went back into the forest to hunt some more. It was there he made friends with two young guinea baboon monkeys—who he was convinced were a new couple. These primates made his stay at the place zestful. It had all been leisure, fun, leisure, fun; they went hunting, trees climbing and most especially played together.

He had won the hearts of this couple some time ago by first giving them bananas whenever they met. The first time was when he entered the bush and wound up eating papaya and guava. He had found some good bananas but on his way back, the monkeys robbed their hands—a gesture that they pleaded to have the fruit, you ought to see the look on their faces too. He was compassionate enough to part with the bananas with him, throwing it at them. They waved him bye in gratitude. Although what seemed more gratifying to Matthew was the way they had caught the bananas without missing out on any throw.

Ersatz man, Matthew thought these creatures are.

Poor things, so good at recollecting faces, they remembered Matthew as soon as they saw him in the forest again, which brought excitement to them, and they chatted to him—what he believed were greetings. He smiled, waving back.

Later the same day when he returned to give them some more bananas, he found them in trouble; the monkeys had a snake troubling them at the top of the tree. They were so frustrated and hurt its skin that it had fallen off the tree, gotten furious, and made to give one of them a good bite.

This was when Matthew arrived at the spot. He butchered the snake, first hitting it with the back of his machete so that its head would not get off its body, rushing to bite anything around—which would surely die with it. The snake lost strength upon sharp and heavy strikes on its head and Matthew butchered it, for the sake of the acrimony he had for snakes. After this, he gave the bananas to them.

The monkeys were apparently the happiest mammals on the planet that day, but how were they to express this much feeling to the one who hasn't learned to communicate in their way? They just chattered still, jumped up happily, and followed Matthew about in the forest.

However bizarre it might sound, this was some sort of an encouragement to him to go about hunting the forest while he took the monkeys under his aegis, because you see—monkeys too can be really great hunters, not even after they have observed how it is done. His friendship with them thrilled and they grew inseparable.

But one thing stands: however close he has grown with others, a man's life would waste away if he doesn't live for his dreams. It later occurred to Matthew that he was meant to let all this pleasure slip behind and give it whatever it takes to live his dream. To chase it. It is only rational to understand that he does not belong here.

All these fell on Matthew one afternoon when he sat to reflect on his existence. But he was not to blame for the delay of his pursuit. It had all been the fault of the one who shared the dream with him, he reassured himself.

Only now, he also got the idea that he ought to have taken Bere's watch since it had fallen on him to keep track of time and keep to it—he was pretty sure Bere would have covered much ground, moreover, it's been a few days since he last saw him.

With a pawpaw in his bag, he left for the spot, arrived there and found that it was very much without Bere. The

hope he had been subtly brimming with was crushed by this feeling of disillusionment, of being betrayed, of not being as smart as he thought, he cried bitterly.

There are always stories of friends like this in the English textbooks you read in high school, cases of those who outsmarted you because they were too rapacious and self-centered... they now truly made sense to Matthew.

But one more thing, he couldn't think of how Bere would reach the vision alone; he has no picture of Honald's house and he doesn't have the dream in full. More so, he had been to Ibadan earlier but had had to return because he was aware he couldn't do it alone, so something else must have happened. It no longer felt like Bere betrayed him, he must go in search of Bere.

Discombobulated as he was, Matthew found his way back to the forest, took his things and informed the monkeys he lived with that he was going to leave, making gestures—the way he always did. This was no good news to the families.

The monkeys he had first made friends with could not see him off because they'd aged so much. Their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren were the ones who accompanied him to the spot he had left Bere. One of the little ones, borne to his hands, jumped on him and

played with his beard—the beard he remembered he hadn't entered the forest with. It wasn't until this point he understood the importance of time and the reason Bere couldn't wait for him.

The primates emitted chatter and growls at the idea of losing the god that came to them, he was gloomy at the idea of not having anything left to call a home or a people, and of going to seek the one that shared in his dream in the direction he knew not of. He was certain these creatures had no idea how much he would miss them too. They parted ways, resigning to what life hurls at them. For Matthew, it was first to find Bere. Everything he needed to accomplish his dream: some part of the vision, his white cassock, and Bible were with Bere.

Matthew went about his search for Bere. He searched open and enclosed areas, sometimes going into thick forests... For days at times, he would feel like the only human on earth. But drenched in perspiration, nothing was going to stop him from this journey.

“Ayiiiiiii,” the word came *following some wicked chuckle* he heard from behind him in the forest one afternoon. In shock, he responded “Yeeeh.”

Kikikiki, laughter came from the voice again, “*I knor yhu kannor turn yah neck now becors I haff stiffun’d it, an any try to turn it will cause dislorkation.*”

It was quite hard to make meaning out of these words especially in the echoing voices in which they were said, but Matthew understood two things that frightened him: this was definitely not Bere's voice, and his neck had truly become hard to turn around. He never believed the myth that demons were in thick forests and that they sometimes entrapped hunters, but the most convincing thing was now happening to him in person. His stance on superstitions, not just this, started to fluctuate right away.

He subvocalized some prayers, poker-faced and replied in fear, “Who are you?”

No speech had followed this when his neck immediately became free followed instantaneously by the apparition of a white human-like creature in his front, the one he only risked a peek of because he was too tensed to wait and take a second look for further observation.

Matthew could go into the wild alone, and kill some untamed animals but he wasn't so stouthearted as to watch some really strange creature. He took to his heels, shouting as he ran to the other end of the locale, outside the thick forest.

In the event of this, Matthew went straight into prayers and a session of reflection as a way to cushion the effect of his trauma. In the session, he grapples with how to act based on reason, become more disciplined, and keep reaching for his dream. It helped, only now he was more careful about what bush or forest he beat.

However innocuous, this experience goaded him to pessimism. He started contemplating if something bad hadn't happened to Bere.

Six

Going for Bere

You didn't know of a beautiful girl until you met Shelvia of Araujo, three towns away from Alapa. No intentions to bring Shakespeare here, no hyperbole, no wheedling painting, Shelvia was nothing but charming. Her neatness, her sophisticated look, the smile, the stance, and all.

Eighteen, five feet tall, sepia and shiny, creative and easy going, she was. She had dimples on her slightly bulbous cheeks and her diastema was especially inviting.

"Man, there are girls and there are girls!!" Men will spell out.

Her front and rear view were also fine subjects of discussion among her peers. *Smirks*. Modesty, you do this!! How interesting it would have been if modesty would allow one to go into the details of this—her points of view—the front and the back. But it is comforting that you know right. You understand.

Once, she had emerged as the second best student in a Mathematics competition organized for all Secondary

Schools at Araujo—more than eighty of them. Her exceptional brilliance was envied and became something many parents wished for their children because you see, there were more than a hundred and sixty of these students, two from each participating school.

Albeit one thing was even more astounding about the narrative of the girl, it was her background. Her parents, people knew, weren't privileged to have the formal; her father fished and her mother paddled canoes—crossing people from one end to the other end. Her family was not wealthy, but they were worthy of emulation in a number of other senses; you could not overlook the dexterity they exhibited at what they do, and their easygoing trait.

Given this, her father soon became a well respected elder at the place; people met him for guidance and support on issues they wouldn't share with just anyone.

Someday, he had rescued two drowning children of the same parents at the river. This made the people of the town introduce him to *Atupanla*, a group of strong and reliable men who rescue people and research into cases of missing people, cases of havoc in the locale, and all that humanists should shoulder for the wellbeing of society. He became the head at the organization before long and it brought him to the spotlight. This made his

two children naturally loved—by many, and highly respected.

Shelvia, every man's dream, was usually the talk of the town—the one women suspected their men were running after or thinking about whenever they wouldn't fulfil filial responsibilities.

They, the men too, sometimes admittedly thought she was a distraction, but you never heard any man say ill of her—even the sapiophiles saw reasons she shouldn't be less attractive. Once or twice, rumor of her relationship with a teacher and one business man in the town had milled around, but neither of this was by any credible means confirmed.

It was at this very point Matthew had arrived at Araujo in search of Bere. There were more people here than he'd seen in the other towns he was coming from, the adrenaline of this experience alone was stress allaying. Everything here would have made him grateful to God but the narrative of his life was always with a *comma*—what meant an issue to him.

He had discovered the difficulty in his speech the last time he had to speak in the forest under an attack. This was as a result of having made gestures and not talked for over a decade—when he lived with the monkeys. Whenever he

wanted to utter something now, it felt like his tongue and other necessary speech organs had atrophied. He had forced it in the forest, under pressure, and had been practicing to do it well thereafter, but it still wasn't coming out naturally. Some words seemed missing in his head, while it was even more challenging for him to utter every word he could remember.

Further, he wasn't looking human any longer. His countenance was strongly primitive and savage. A number of children had run away from him. The reason for this, he couldn't tell—as if all the experiences he had had had debased and washed his view of societal ideals away.

He got lost in the thought of what the problem could be. It appeared most reasonable to him that he must be reeking and dirty looking after he approached a man who in an attempt to look civil, would tilt his head back and forth from Matthew holding his breath all through until he eventually said 'No' to Matthew's rant and left him in a hurry covering his nose with his palm.

This experience was so alienating that Matthew again was forced to do some major thinking on how to come out of his reproach. He got an idea.

He camped himself for days at the summit of a mountain around the town that gave him a special aura. In the

course of this time, he learnt to speak well again, he stripped off his clothing and did the laundry by pressing them hard to rocky surfaces with some leaves that are known to foam when wet. He also bathed and chewed sticks to eschew the obnoxious smell his mouth gave off.

Though worn-out and tattered, his dress was now neat and he looked better; he achieved this milestone, washed his clothes and himself, and it changed something about his narrative...

This time, he met people who promised him he was going to find his lost friend if he could get access to any member of *Atupanla*. He was asked to wait beside a stall where Shelvia, whom they will point at to him, will pass through after school closure—she was in her final year in senior secondary school.

It worked, he thought out of excitement. Getting to meet Shelvia just as insiders had planned seemed magical to him, it was one of the most paradigmatic plans he had seen in years. That wasn't all, needless to add that he seeing Shelvia too naturally elicited some happiness.

There was gladness behind Shelvia's broad smile as she walked Matthew through the path to her father—she and her younger sibling were raised to take pleasure in helping peasants and the less privileged at large. They

knew how it added to humanity and how rewarding it could be religiously.

From afar, Matthew saw a man who sat on an Adirondack chair at the bank of the stream. Despite the unmistakable evening time low temperature at water bodies, this man was not putting on a shirt, he hung it behind the chair, his legs spread as he caught a zen look of the waterflow. Something smelt familiar about this figure; he was weird, but maybe that isn't all, the girl walking closely ahead of him would not allow him to catch a good view of the man.

They eventually got to the Adirondack chair—the familiar smell must have been perceived wrongly, this man here was quite an old man with a wrinkled face.

“This is my dad”, Shelvia introduced after telling something into her father's ear.

Matthew full of hope, “I am more than elated to meet you, sir”.

Matthew was an older man, so father rose to exchange pleasantries with him, “I am no less glad, old one”.

“Old one you say?” Matthew felt teased. *Laughs*. “Well, it is you who will be older here, because I need you to help me do what just age cannot do, and I would feel triumphant if you could help.”

“Why not, if I be in the position to help? Please, you may go on, sir.”

“Thank you. My problem is a missing person's case.”

“Do you by any means know if the missing person drowned in water or got missing on land?”

“He hadn't been to the river, definitely he was stolen or something, the catastrophe happened on land.”

“Arrgh, I regret to say that your assistance is not in my jurisdiction, but you will still be helped.”

Skeptical about what could come next, Matthew said, “Do you think I can afford any assistance beyond your reach?”

Laughs. “Old one, we do not work for money or material things alike, we work for the good of society, and I am especially willing to get your back. Only, the tao of helping does not rationally apply here; I will recommend certain necessary procedures. I will guide you through it all and stay by your side all through.

“Truly, I'm the head of the Apatanla group—the right organization to help your case, but may I add that due to our hierarchical modus operandi, some part of the organization are completely unperturbed with some of our operations..there are several divisions in the body: the land rescue team, water rescue team, fire rescue team, medical team, etc—with each group having a leader vested with the power to manage the affairs of its niche.

“As the overall leader, all I do is sign proposals and feedback, give directions or suggestions when division leaders are stuck. But fear not, I will link you up with the right division”.

Matthew felt relieved to his spines, “I would be very grateful if your platform would consider helping.”

“No worries, old one. You are not a native of Araujo, are you?”

“Araujo?”

“This town I mean.”

“No, I'm not. Does it count?”

“I already assure you of our full support, old one, you can rest assured we'd also be glad to help you out.” He called on Shelvia, who's been standing a few feet away, “Please help take Pa to Àkànjí. Tell the captain that Pa has come from me.”

Shelvia's father or *Number One* as members of *Atupanla* referred to him, grabbed Matthew's hand to stop him from prostrating to show gratitude. He also promised to always come around Àkànjí's office to know the progress of the case. Matthew left with Shelvia. She dropped her backpack home on their way.

Seven

Matthew Received Help Hands

At Àkànjí's office. While he was sitting on a bench with Shelvia, Matthew had noticed two hefty men dragging a young man out of an office. He pretended not to see the humiliation by these humanists but his heart began to thud.

"Next, please", a voice called from within the office. Shelvia arose and asked Matthew to come with her. He followed with some hesitations in his mind.

They came into the office of the captain, a man whom Shelvia saw Herbert Macaulay in, particularly because of the thick whisker-like hair that stood like a barricade between his nose and upper lip; the kind of hair that tufts below one's nostrils so that one looks dead serious to adults but seems like a joke to kids.

He was a man of few words, and one of those men who could naturally make you perceive confidence in their sitting.

"Hello, sir, this is Mr Matthew. My dad asked that I bring him to you on the basis of his problem."

“All right,” the captain said, casting a cursory look on Matthew, as if he were reading him up. “Take a seat, sir.”

“And I my leave?” Shelvia built on the Captain's ‘take a’ as if she ought to cut down on her use of words.

He smiled, “Of course beauty.”

Something in Matthew wanted to shout “*hey, don't let the last person I know leave me this time. Let me go with her and die in her hands, head on her bosom, under her watch.* But, but, but...” these just weren't logical. He craved death with reasons that were profound, that could make poets feel honored to write you an epitaph your people wouldn't reject after you're long gone.

Eventually, he said “thank you” and waved Shelvia bye teary-eyed. Shelvia didn't pay attention to his eyes but something in the way he waved was eliciting emotions—Shelvia felt it to her heart. But it felt surreal too; she couldn't remember having felt this way before or having learnt anything about this stranger. She would get to figure this out sometime, but this wasn't the right time, there were those thoughts on her mind as she returned home.

Matthew was given an audience after sitting. Tears broke over his cheeks as he was going to start talking. These

were not really tears of the thought of finding Bere, they were more of his fear and uncertainty about his current locale...

“Your wellbeing is our concern and we sympathize with you, but it would be better if you go ahead into giving the details of why you're sent here. I don't know if *Number One* gave you a special message but here we basically deal with issues concerning people who go missing on land.”

Matthew maximized the leverage, “Exactly, sir. I'm here because I lost a friend so dear to me. I have been to several towns in search of him, but all efforts have been fruitless. It would mean a lot to me if you could help get him back.”

“It's fine. You said you've spoken with the *Number One*, right?”

“The man whose daughter brought me?”

The captain sighed, “Yes.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Okay,” he drew a box out of his table, brought out a file, went through the papers in it and passed one of them to Matthew, “here,” he pointed at the space provided and

how he should fill them... he told him there were people outside the office who could help him fill it in the lingua franca.

The paper was filled. He returned it to the office of the captain, who went through it on the spot and ordered that he be accommodated in their custody as they investigate the case.

Matthew never thought the experience here would be fine at any rate, but it turned out he was taken good care of. He was fed well and catered to in terms of staying neat—here, he brushed and bathed. He could also have a prolonged stare at the sky or roof as he reflected on his life or some other subject matters.

* * * * *

Should you care to see the filled form:

S/N	Required	Input
1	Name:	Bere
2	Age:	29
3	Gender:	Male
4	Height:	<input type="checkbox"/> Short <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tall, or _____
5	Weight:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Slim <input type="checkbox"/> Fat, or _____
6	Skin tone:	Dark
7	Marital Status:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Single <input type="checkbox"/> Married <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced <input type="checkbox"/> Engaged <input type="checkbox"/> Complicated
8	Religion:	Islam
9	Missing locale:	Unknown
10	Suggested whereabouts:	Nil
11	Place of origin:	Qkan Oba, Kabba.

	Special note (optional):	
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The following day, he went with some of the hefty men in custody from town to town in search of Bere. Seven days and seven nights, they had toiled before they found Bere. He was seen among a group of slaves in the palace of the Agbayi's Baale. Matthew was pretty sure his sight couldn't deceive him. Two of the slaves left Matthew with others, and went around the village to collect some data as they said. They'd join them back shortly and return to Araujo.

When they got back, he was asked to sit where he sat with Shelvia the first day. Two guards went inside to see the captain. They returned to call on Matthew. The captain assured him.

The captain said, "I told you we would help. So glad you saw your missing friend yourself." *A triumphant smile followed.*

"My all thanks to you and your team. You've just made me the happiest man on Earth. I was already beginning to give up on finding my friend again."

“No, things don't work that way, never give in. There is every need to work with the saying that it is not over until it is over. But one other thing. Your friend is not here yet.” Matthew cut in, “Yes.”

“You will have to exercise patience and stay here with us as we take the necessary processes in fighting fights like this.”

“Oh, please, Anything, sir.”

The conversation went on a little further but they're pretty insignificant or worthy of note. Matthew returned to his accommodation after which the captain held a conference with other members of the division.

It turned out the next step they would be taking to get Bere back was to write to Agbayi. Back in the day, you either wrote or sent hieroglyphics—symbolic items, when you needed to reach someone far away for official purposes.

* * * * *

Captain Àkànjí's Letter to Agbayi:

*24/7 Rescue Gate,
Atapanla, Araujo North,
Araujo.
October 2, 1955.*

*The Baale,
Old Oke Ilu Road,
Agbayi.*

Sir,

LETTER OF REQUEST

Reports reaching us have confirmed that a Mr Bere of Okan Oba community, who now answers Erupeju, was lost to your empire where he is enslaved. In an attempt to maintain unity and ensure that peace reigns between us, we hereby write to you to kindly request that you set him free so that he too could go about leading life and ultimately contributing his quota to society.

It would be for the good of all if this is settled amicably. Atapanla doesn't wish to be heard colonizing another town over the issue of freedom, again. Thank you.

*Peace for Peace,
signed.
Captain Àkànjì*

The message reached the palace of the Baale of Agbayi on time, Atapanla received a prompt and brusque response which states that the town or empire, whatever Araujo has made it appears like, knows nothing about what it has been alleged with.

Their response partly reads: “No one was recently enslaved in Agbayi, no creature answers Bere. If this is something you do chiefly for your unselfish selfishness, the good news is that it cannot help you get back what you haven't lost to us.”

The letter from Agbayi came in more lengthier words but no part of it was in favor of Araujo's request. This was especially displeasing to the captain. One other conference, this time involving the Baale and *Number One*—who had sent his cap to represent him due to his unavailability, was held by the captain in response to this turn out. In it, they concluded they would send an Àròkò to Agbayi.

“I think we can be certain that the said slave will immediately be freed after our Àròkò gives them a choice between war or peace. No town in its right senses would

intentionally go to war with us—they could not have been deaf to our intimidating performances on the war front.”

Chortles.

The captain added, “Na who born bastard?” *Everyone laughed over it.*

All were in sync, “They should know they would learn the hard way.”

The conference was brought to an end and two Àròkọ were sent to Agbayi: a wrapped leaf that contained some gunpowder, and a bottle of honey. The former connoted war proposal while the latter was an option for peace.

Àròkọ—coded messages or hieroglyphics as the Egyptians say it—was very prominent among the Yoruba people back in the day. It is some kind of non-verbal means of communication where signs, symbols, or random items are used to encode messages that the receiver decodes intuitively on the basis of concept, circumstantially. This suggests that most of the hieroglyphics used do not have fixed meanings as their interpretations may change hinging a great deal on the circumstances of the communicators.

Among others, the Yoruba people have Àròkọ of love, Àròkọ of directions, Àròkọ of assistance, Àròkọ of victory,

Àròkọ of peace, and Àròkọ of war. What the response from Agbayi begged is that of war. But for the purposes of civility, the people would be opportune to choose between peace and war.

Now, whatever Agbayi sends back to Araujo is a cue to tell what will follow, where whatever is sent back is considered as unwanted.

The surrounding towns as well as quite some other towns outside the state knew Araujo for their exceptional dexterity at the face of war. This makes it herculean for towns to pick wars with them, so there were about ninety percent chances that Agbayi would choose honey over gun powder. Well, that exactly was the opposite; they chose gunpowder and rejected the honey.

The honey rejected got back to Araujo alongside fourteen threaded opposing cowries. Contextually, this meant that not only were they ready for the war against these hectors, they also preferred to meet on the war front by fortnight.

They were up to something, the captain ascertained at the following conference. He stood in vexation and exclaimed, "Who has prepared their yams assuring them of soup accessibility?!"

Silence.

“Okay, they would kill us right?” *Noise*, followed by *Deafening silence*. The captain bawled out, “they are a hundred years too early!!”

No climax after this, they'd reached the decisive point, and whoever would see the end of the prospective war might emerge because nothing was going to stop them from having this war. They needed to show Agbayi that an okra cannot grow past its planter. Most of the town's iconic fighters and warmen had learnt the art of war from Atapanla.

At their Arsenal, you would find axes, swords, amulets around fulcrums, flags, bloodthirsty dagger, war hammers, bows and arrows, forty-one long thrusting spears, thick leather greaves, a few jungle boots, backpacks, bronze shield, and some antique firearms hanging around the walls. There are also some horses on the campestral used by war commandants.

Here it was again, the time to revisit this armoury and make do with the arms in it. An avenue to show off all they had learnt over the years of peaceful settlement. A room to expand their coast—rule a new people and have more people under the umbrella of Araujo. It was all for humanity. Any which way.

EIGHT

On The Warfront Where Things Went Askew

It went out of kilter for Agbayi. There were spills of blood here and there, turning dark as they got thick on some surfaces. This child too, an infant of about eight months old, had blood on his forehead and somewhere on the fingers of his left hand. The blood on his forehead was a result of a mild scar; it wasn't gushing, it had dried off, but it remained disheartening on the innocent face.

The palm of his hands were already peeling off, looking rough upon aggressive scratches by way of hastening his propulsion in the bush. This setting, the locale where the infant crawled to his mother, was farmland with cultivated ridges of the previous farming year that were not already completely flattened over abandonment.

He was crying as he crawled to the breast of his dying mother from a supposed not too far point—how much he had covered could only be speculated. The sight of this was a terrible image to the heart. Nobody knew exactly what had happened to this woman for it was in the face of war. What was most probable is that the dying mother had accidentally, or not, thrown the child stripped to her back away as she ran to escape the sporadic exchange of

firearms and followed in the higgledy-piggledy escapement of people alike.

The widow, this dying mother, was a specimen of messy people, as society would later say. The town crier had heralded news of the war all through the locale, so that everyone became apprised of the fortress close to the king's palace—where they were expected to occupy twenty-four hours before the war commenced.

Horse-drawn vehicles had gone around to carry people who had at least a family member holding a recognized title in the town. Others had the *carte blanche* to decide whether or not they wanted the asylum.

Indeed, everyone wanted protection but the food factor was one reason a proletarian usually had to stay longer at home; the bourgeoisie and all title holders were more favored—they started to receive meals as soon as they arrived at the stronghold. If you were *nobody*, as the concerned class saw themselves, you wouldn't be fed until perhaps two days after the commencement of the war.

Whatever the ruling heads thought of them, this class of people never got to figure out. It wasn't so easy to tell whether the same people who offered you protection didn't want you to survive. Because what if you didn't get

hit by a stray bullet from the bestial justice process but died all the same in the asperity of hunger? Tossing and turning, one might groan to death.

The dying widow, who as a matter of unfortunate fact, couldn't survive, had lost her life because she had thought about the circumstance, and worked her calculations properly, juxtaposing the odds of dying at the asylum on empty stomach against those of staying home until the fortress started to share meals. She thought there were more chances of the hunger death for a lactating mother than you ever had with escaping while the war was on, on the basis of the point that women were never killed—at least not intentionally.

Things were never *any* fine for the poor. First, they slept compressed—in numbers that overpopulated the mats at every section that was not the first class.

Second, in the name of security, you didn't get to go out to the points where you get dentifrice, soap, or sponge, or even a place to use it on yourself. All proletarians who survived the war seeking shields at the fortress came out unhealthy when the war was over. It was like trading your health for the uncertainty of death, an idea that didn't make any sense to some people.

Of course, some women, children, as well as a handful of men who did not think themselves qualified to be on the war front, ignored the public asylum and sought some more comfortable, dignified refuge. There were people who went to forests they knew war was very unlikely to reach. They cooked, ate, discussed, and if they were with their partners, attempted fun... only, they wore threaded leaves that were simulacra of their surroundings, so that lying flat on their belly once there was a suspected move was all they had to do.

There were also people who hid at the attic of their huts, if they had one, or directly to the roof if it was firm enough. You saw people everywhere you ducked into because everyone was hiding.

You saw the lame, those people who made you think 'lame' is a condition of not being able to walk at all, ran as best as they could. They didn't walk, they ran. Truly they were lames because their stance was never fit nor could they walk balanced, but all these didn't seem to be so much of a hindrance as one always thought.

Ideally, it shouldn't call for this much hurly-burly, except that *people suffer more in their imagination than in reality*, as Seneca put it. No one would kill a disabled person, there was also no need for women to run helter-skelter because they were not to be killed back in the day, it was

pretty unethical— women were never perceived as threats until they started to advocate for equal rights. Equal rights to share in the pleasures of being a man but never in the downsides of it.

Whimsically enough, the same women who advocate equal rights do not fight to match up with men in times of trouble. They are protected, they demand it if they're not given. They assume their traditional gender stance and stay back while men go to fight in times of war. Rapacity will not make them not want to share of the rights and responsibilities of men, but there is always a reversion to the original stance in tough times.

Thankfully, this war was fought sometime before this time; women received so much care, sometimes even from the other warriors that were discharging firearms at their men. Sometimes it is reasonable to think if there would be this concept of feminism given that primitive man had made the woman equal to him right from inception—chances are that having seen the hell of a responsibility she were to shoulder to enjoy equal rights, every woman would be advocating that women are subordinate to men.

Blind to how he would be rewarded for it, the man did all to satisfy and keep women safe and unbothered. He made laws that favored her. Except, however adeptly

proposed the structure of the event and the proper procedures to be taken are, mutual words were liable to be breached as the episodes of war unfold awry. One reason men, especially warriors, will do anything to ensure that their women are protected in war times. Yes, WAR!

The art of war is the heart of war, he who misses out on it loses it completely. There is no in-between; you are either able or not able to conquer. It fell on Agbayi to be unsettled. Araujo was pretty confident in himself because this fact was not hidden to them; they knew Agbayi would lose the war. There was definitely every reason to fight this fight, you would capture the people and govern them alongside the treasure of their land, only how this directly adds to humanity remained largely unthought.

War was seldom an option, except every minute traced back in the life of man glorifies his present life as the more tamed. But polarized, the latter ideology might be dead wrong, because at the time, you heard more of friendly bouts between towns. An event where each town nominated her fighters of timber and caliber, who met at a rendezvous to wrestle while concerned Ọba or Baálé watched alongside other interested residents of the place.

With this practice, fighting for or against something could be very entertaining, some people would be laughing, jubilating, or jumping in excitement before they remembered the notion of the event. This made bout the more preferred option to determine who was superior, rather than fighting wars to claim lives. But there were exceptional cases, often governed by the inordinate desire to show off, when war wasn't negotiated before it was taken. You got extremely angry at the other people, they got furious at you, and boom you wanted to show that you deserved more respect.

This was the cradle of the war between Araujo and Agbayi. It had started when blindfolded with anger, they could little see the aftermath of their proposal and acceptance. It had all been fantasized but executed all the same.

On the very first day of the war, both people met at the territory they shared—an abundantly wide campestral where you walked nearly two hours before coming in contact with houses or getting a feeling you're in an active environment. That was the practice, you were to fight in civility; respect the palace, the women, the children, and the disabled. The point was to fight only those that proved threats. The max you could do, when worse came to worst, was to enslave all in the categories highlighted.

You didn't see kings become slaves, though, they always chose the option of suicide to eschew ignominy.

Death is faster than reproach, the dialectical mantra associated with the blue blood translates word for word.

All these were known and understood facts, yet war was a resort even the coward could embrace—not to strain you with the burden of seeking instances, there were also cowards behind the squads both people brought to the mark.

Agbayi were the first to arrive at the spot. They sang songs that intrigued morale and demonstrated strength waiting for the Araujo squad. Laying ambush before the commencement of war was never an option here, it was all fair and transparent.

The Araujo Atapanla squad appeared in a quite underwhelming number led by three brown big horses the commandants rode on. Two of the commandants, the ones side-by-side the central, were holding red flags. They didn't run, neither with horses or feet. It had been an orderly match-like short strides, one that sent an intimidating impression to the opponents.

The men at the back of the Balogun who led the Agbayi squad had attempted to take to their heels upon the sight

they caught, but were stopped and reassured by the Oluwo who was the last man *behind all*. In order of traditional spirituality, the Balogun was not only considered the most powerful man in each Yoruba town, he was also the head of warriors in many places. The Oluwo is the next in command. Once, the Oluwo had hit an opponent with a stick of broom and had him drop dead— they could be that powerful, but their presence couldn't make the frightened warmen unsee the evil they had seen ahead of them.

Aside from a backpack in which he carried roasted yam and some water, a war hammer and a bloodthirsty dagger, the least armed personnel in the Atapanla squad was also having a sword in his baldric belt, tying an amulet on his waist, holding a long thrusting spear with one hand and a bronze shield with the other, standing determined in his thick leather greaves. This was relatively nothing compared to the commandants who were the most equipped, they wore jungle boots, had guns with them, bronze shields, helmets, amulets, and hung some other arms on the costume of their horses.

The commandants with the red flags dismounted their horses and walked up to the Balogun on the other end of the campestral, all three shared an especially serious look. The Balogun too approached them, so that their meeting was at what seemed like the midpoint of the

spot—you ought to be smart and cautious on the battlefield.

They exchanged words briefly and nodded occasionally. They had altogether agreed that the first squad to get ready should shoot in the air as a way of notifying the other, while the other shoots as well to show that they were ready too. The first to shoot then shoot a second time to imply assent to the commencement of the war. That was the crux of their meeting, they went back to their people.

It hadn't been a couple of minutes when Agbayi shot into the air. The other people, Araujo still had flags to situate to define the boundary between them and their opponents. They did it before long, but it wasn't as short as a couple minutes. The commandants addressed their squad for the last time before the war began—they told them there was nothing to be scared of.

“While I have heard some of you chant apothegms like ‘Kill me today and I will die no more’, ‘we transition to live an unlive life after death—kill me now and I get there to gain ground before you’, and all that, I sincerely do want to assure you that no one, I mean absolutely no living being in this squad will go with the war. You would not be killed nor would you be enslaved...” the first commandant had barely uttered the last word when deep and raucous

shouts of "Oooooo aaaaii, oooooo aaaaiii" had cut him short. Chanting uniformly like this got the warmen high spirited. It is not an uncommon practice with armed men. *You need to boost your morale*, they say. Sometimes it is to the brink of singing songs that express your blitheness to whether you or they are terminated in consideration of how obstinate you are with doing without them.

The other commandants ordered that they had *one house* until they were done speaking to the men. The talking was done. Their gun had been shot and the shot of the Agbayi squad had followed almost instantaneously. You could tell that these people were eager to devour the Atapanla army as a meronym to Araujo—in fact it was going to get to that if they conquered these stout-hearted warriors.

All they had to do was to get rid of the warmen before them and get into Araujo to start claiming the spaces they could win. If they could coerce the inhabitants of a place to surrender to them or take their lives if they were nonconforming, then the space becomes theirs. Either of the people could take this advantage upon a conquest on the battlefield.

But one thing they didn't have in common: the Atapanla squad cut branches of trees per person killed—where

each branch represents a life. They were to cut down the tree when no branch was left, and moved on to the next.

Agbayi, on the other hand, were to layer fairly big granite stones under any trees Araujo had started cutting, where each stone meant a life taken.

Araujo had brought the fourth tree down when they noticed a granite. It was the death of Ejebu, a humanist, the most outlandish and ostensibly abominable death—they never died on war fronts. They believed that as humanists fighting for the right course, it was not ideal for them to taste death in the process, a belief that had worked for them for eons.

Admittedly, there were no recent records of any death at the war associated with the people. The experience was top-notch, it was promising, it was especially eliciting stone courage in the quasi-pusillanimous among the fighters. Without doubt, they knew something had gone wrong somewhere.

They replaced the two red flags they planted around with white ones. It was an official way to call it quits or say that you surrendered.

NINE

Dream Attainment

News of the death of the Atapanla armed man, Alapola, got to the town ahead of the warriors. On their way back home, they were received by the leaders of all the divisions in the organization.

With each clutching an end of the poles that ran through the edges of the red fabric in which Alapola was laid, four hefty men shouldered his corpse back to the village. At a point when the weight got unbearable, due in large part to the thought of the distance to be covered, coupled with lifelessness, three of the men were replaced by some other men—the fourth man had insisted that he was okay. No one would have doubt in this, he was considered the most powerful in this Atapanla division. He loved to floss his strength. More than this is the fact that his lugubrious heart felt it owed this much to an icon like Alapola.

There were no discussions or asides, you always had to pay that last respect to heroic men, especially if they died fighting. But there was this peculiarity in lieu of talking among yourselves, you were to mourn by singing gloomily all through the thoroughfare.

As was ideal, *ideal* in the sense that if you did it some other way around you were giving off an impression you didn't intend, the bland dirge came first. It was said, or *drawn* as it should literally translate from the way the natives put it, by one of the armed men who had learned to do *ljala*.

The bland dirge goes:

Emọ kú ojú òpó dí
Òpáláńbá ọ́tí èèbó fọ
Onigbansọ kan ko ri i só
Àlágbedè Ọ̀rùn ò ri ọ
Alapola sùn re oo

The actual threnody they started to sing glumly followed immediately afterwards:

Ìsé kíń dé dé sé
Ìsé kí má yí dé dé sé oo
Araujo èè ba ogun lo oo
Ti abá dele áo ńńa beré oo
Ìsé kíń dé dé sé. X2

Emọ kú ojú òpó dí
Òpáláńbá ọ́tí èèbó fọ
Onigbansọ kan ko ri i só

Àlágbèdè Ọ̀rùn ò ri rọ
Alapola sùn re oo

The foregoing lines too were sung by stressing the words, but in a way that could still be danced or attached with whatever would make it singable.

In some more threnodies, the army called the names of death, walked the walk of death, sang the song of death, and occasionally sighed the sigh of death—you saw all those actions that were fascinating enough to make you envision how beautifully the dead live on the other end—as they grieved the corpse they were carrying back to Araujo in *very dark* sobriety.

There were two things to be sober for in this event. First, this was the first time, since a very long time, they had lost an armed man in a war. Second, they knew this must be an aftermath of a malfeasance on their horizon, which foreshadowed that if wisdom is not applied, calamity may soon befall Araujo from the quasi-sophomoric hands of Agbayi.

It followed that they ought to call it off and return to the breast of their motherland, where they could further divine the cause of this predicament. The fact that it was the least expected of things in the town made it a great deal of a thing; it seemed bedevilled.

Matthew was still in custody. He was apprised of the news but to whom does he run? He was determined to wait and face his fate. Whatever it is.

Before long, the wide gate to the custody was thrown open and three horses came running in on their own. The commandants who used them were to walk back to the custody, implying that they had failed as leaders in the art of war.

Next, was a procession of glumly armed people who grieved, wailing coordinately into the open field of the custody. The wife, children, father, and siblings of the deceased were already at the ground in black or other colours of fabrics that didn't call attention. It was a bad hair day, or even year, for Araujo.

Matthew couldn't make it through the numbers that mobbed the gathering; he stood aloof and was too insignificant an entity to be noticed. He knew it was a send-off arrangement, where you culturally gave the dead to the hands of their ancestors.

“More than a father for the home...behind”, Matthew faintly picked some of the words said out loud at the gathering. In all that he overheard, nothing suggested that he was perceived as a threat to the people. His judgement

was right. The *Number One* had picked him up as he left the custody later that day.

“I do not have the right words to describe how miserable I feel about the wrath my fate has brought upon your people. Slough of despond I'm wallowing into,” Matthew expressed his grave concern.

Number One in his reassuring way, “It is fine.”

They seldom talked as they went through the thoroughfare to the abode of the *Number One*. It was a large, beautifully painted building, one that had Atapanla's logo drawn below its wall at the entrance. In the house, Matthew saw a dark interior with a white curtain, machetes, hooks, a net, a painting of two children—a son and a daughter hanging on the wall at the exit, some bags, a large mat and bones of animals. You could tell he was a proletarian aside from the title he held with Atapanla.

A lot were rather whimsical about this man, one reason Matthew wished to know him more. Both people talked, went into deeper conversations and started to feel an aura of similarity. In the long run, they came to realize that they were destined to continue together; *Number One* is the same Bere they had gone to war for.

This was a huge surprise to them both. It made them shed tears of past times, of un-maximized, untapped potentials, and of a dream ebbing away. They hugged each other tightly and were strongly emotional.

Matthew gave the narrative of the suffering that followed his act of time mismanagement while they were on the rock where Bere walked in his sleep.

"I never knew time could inflict this much crucible on one," Matthew said wiping the tear under his left eye.

"I kinda feel like I caused all of this. I left the spot where you left me because I thought I was fooled. I thought I was forsaken, I felt insignificant, it wasn't a good feeling. I had to start a new life."

Matthew disagreed, "You didn't cause a bit of my suffering; I came to wisdom late in life. Now, I understand that one has to take it up for himself and design the life he lives. If you wait for life to happen, it happens to you, not for you. We have got to take charge and reach for the most essential things in our journey."

"You always put your philosophies to practice, see, you reached for me." They laughed over this. Bere was always so creative he painted images right wherever is most befitting. This quite helped change the topic.

“Definitely,” Matthew nodded. “And how quickly time flies, you are now a father of two grown-ups and a family man. I am quite jealous, to be sincere.”

“You are a really old man yourself, an idea which I think I would be baffled with all my life. I mean we were age mates.” These blunt words already made it out of Bere's mouth before he could restrain.

The Panic of Growing Older hit them. Both people's mouths askew, they stared into the still air in the room, made eye contact, and broke into tears again. Another hug followed.

Still with teary eyes, Matthew said, “The mismanagement of time being the most underrated thing in life is a major substratum of any life not worth living. So far, I have come to see that our lives are nothing but a cycle, some pretty short duration; we are timed. It is all about time. First, you thought life is unlimited, then you understood it's ephemeral and you started to despise the idea of ageing.”

“Well,” Bere continued in an attempt to reinstate Matthew, “I think this is a time to be happy and filled with joy. Very few are this opportune; we have been through hell yet here we are, ageing in sound health. Do you not think we should be grateful for this?”

Bere nodded. The conversation became more engaging as it went on.

It was disclosed that the white curtain in the room was Bere's cassock, but Matthew's he kept for him. Imon, it is called.

“You are always trustworthy and reliable.”

“You are disciplined and resilient.”

Kikikiki, they would laugh occasionally as they caught up on old times.

It soon grew dark and dinner was ready. Here you ate evening meals outside your house, within your veranda—the unroofed open space of your land. You enjoyed your meal having the fresh air that came from the wild, on top of the chilled *omi amu*—the water you retrieved from a Yoruba water pottery resembling a gourd.

Bere's wife came to them, culturally greeted both men and knelt to tell her husband that food was ready. Bere ordered that they set the table for them. He went outside with Matthew, sat with him at the food, passed the hand-washing bowl to him and led the eating. Other members of his household ate together on another table quite distant from theirs.

Matthew had commended the culinary arts of Bere's wife, among a number of other things, but he still hadn't said that which he was more concerned about.

“Nothing should make one give up on his dream, you know right?” He did eventually.

Bere laughed hard.

Matthew saw an advantage to take, “Yes, I'm being serious about this. Man must live up to his dream in life or he would be living for the dreams of other men.”

Over the *Iyan* and *Egusi* meal they were having, Bere said, “Look, Matthew, my very dear friend, I understand where you're coming from as much as I appreciate such fine vantage points. But I'm just not sure there is a one-size-fits-all formula for a life well lived. You see, I already have all that I need; I fish and eat really good food. I make not too poor earnings too. I have a home of my own, a god-send wife, and two lovely children with whom I'm now able to practise my faith more with gusto. The best part? I have more leisure to draw and do some painting with. I do not lack anything meaningful.”

There is a profound margin between pursuing one's dream and being covetous, a clear line. Although Matthew had been with Bere for some time now, nothing

gave him the impression that Bere should already feel satisfied with his existence, aside from his large one-room building and the pretty woman with him. It was obvious Bere had changed a great deal from his vigorous, determined self who was bent on chasing his dream, the one he now faintly remembered.

Bere got distracted but Matthew had made up his mind to be unflinching in the trajectory of his dream. He kept going and was seeking distractions from men, while trying to avoid distractions—it seemed to him, as much as he could.

Direction taking was helpful and he arrived Ibadan before long—only now the picture of his destination was no longer so clear. Many times he just went in the direction of his intuition. Reaching his destination was more of a thing for the third eye. Lacking clarity, he wandered in the large city of Ibadan, giving it his all, and every iota of his might.

One blessed afternoon, after a long time of drifting here and there, he wound up resting under a tree behind a building. The locale looked familiar, it smelt familiar, too. The building he saw ahead was old, of course, *'whoever sees the already dilapidating building knows it must have come through better days'*.

“Honald”, he heard someone call from the building. He was *extremely* elated—for no confirmation could be more reassuring. The time had eventually come. He never felt this fulfilled and accomplished all his life, it was sheer gratifying. That feeling. He wore his broadest smile.

He knew what should follow, but man is not always in control, so exhausted he was that he couldn't go turn around to see for himself. He lay relaxed under the tree to rest.

Transitioning came. Matthew, from an attempt to rest, eventually went to *rest in peace*. He was buried at the same spot. Lanke and Honald attended his funeral service. Lanke is a young beautiful lady who loves to keep pets. Honald is her cat.

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There are a thousand and one people that I should appreciate for making the publication of my debut book possible in one way or another, but sadly, there is a but: this book is about goalodicy and not acknowledgment.

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